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Contribution from

Waterford Institute of Technology

to consultation on the

National Planning Framework Ireland 2040

31 March 2017

1. Guiding Principles

- 1.1 A National Planning Framework is to be welcomed as a tool for co-ordinated future development. Planning on a national scale, with associated prioritised investment, will require a new way of thinking about citizenship and a new way of conducting politics and managing resources in Ireland.
- 1.2 Future plans need to start with a recognition that, notwithstanding the relatively high life quality of many in Ireland, according to all measures high life-quality is not equitably distributed across the population. Plans for Ireland 2040 need to recognise the existing inequities in development and the particular, unique challenges faced by certain regions, cities and populations. The South East requires corrective attention in any future plan for the country; it is well documented that the region lags behind the national average in many indicators. **WIT advocates for particular attention to be given in the Planning Framework to the recovery and development of the South East.**¹
- 1.3 It is appropriate that the focus of any proposed National Plan should be on improving the quality of life of citizens. Education is particularly important in determining quality of life: “Higher levels of educational attainment are generally linked to better occupational prospects and higher income for individuals, hence having a positive effect on their quality of life. People who have completed tertiary education improve their possibilities to secure a job: the unemployment rate decreases with the educational level.”² It follows that **prioritisation of the enhancement of higher education opportunities and infrastructure will support significantly the achievement of quality of life-related goals.**
- 1.4 The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (the “Hunt” report) indicates that “Education in general, and higher education in particular, is a force for individual growth, societal progress and cultural development. [...] Education contributes to economic development and to the quality of life that economic development makes possible.”³ The National Planning Framework must therefore take cognisance of the contribution of higher education institutions to future national development and give due priority to the development of the higher education infrastructure in support of national planning objectives. **The future development of the South-east in general and in Waterford city in particular requires the enhancement of the higher education infrastructure in the region and the city.**
- 1.5 An holistic approach that defines and builds on a sense of active, participatory citizenship and shared responsibility should be evident in the Framework. Higher education is a vehicle for **cultivating citizenship** and, therefore, further investment in higher education will greatly contribute to these wider end goals.
- 1.6 Acting on the recommendations of the Plan will require a robust planning process, legislative support and the political and social wherewithal to see through and defend planning priorities and their consequences. The process by which plans align with the

¹ The South-east comprises Waterford city and county, Kilkenny, Wexford, Carlow and South Tipperary (defined in this way by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in its regional skills bulletins and related publications.)

² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Quality_of_life_indicators_education#Education_in_the_context_of_quality_of_life

³ See *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, 2011. pp.29-30

National Plan, the process by which the Plan is managed and its priorities advanced, needs to be clearly articulated.

2. Alternatives to Dublin

- 2.1 Focussing development in a manner that counter-balances Dublin will be of greater long-term benefit for the rest of the country in that it will allow for more distributed economic and population growth and, more importantly, will legitimise places outside Dublin by making them channels of increased investment.
- 2.2 If the construction of a counter balance to Dublin is to be effective, that alternative must not only attract equal emphasis in any Planning Framework but must also have the requisite critical mass and capacity. The combination of the three major urban centres in the South of the country (Waterford, Cork and Limerick), with a current combined population of 230,000⁴, represents a viable combination that has the critical mass and capacity to present an alternative growth centre to Dublin.
- 2.3 The inequities indicated above in terms of quality of life are evident in any comparison of Dublin with the South-east. Addressing these inequities must be prioritised in the National Planning Framework.
 - The average household income in the South-east is 89% of the national average; in the Greater Dublin Region it is 110%.⁵
 - The employment rate in the South-east is 66.7% with an unemployment rate of 11.9%, the worst in the country. The unemployment rate in Dublin, on the other hand, is 7.6%.⁶
 - With regard to the Skills of its population, the Greater Dublin Region ranks first across all eight regions in Ireland for third-level participation (63.9%), third level graduations (46.4%) and STEM-related graduations (9.1%), exceeding the national average on all scores (the averages being, respectively, 61%, 32.4% and 7.3%). The South-east, on the other hand, ranks fifth in participation (60.6%), sixth in graduations from third level (28.9%), and last for STEM-related graduates (6%), in all cases scoring well below the national average.⁷
- 2.4 The co-ordination and development of an alternative growth option to Dublin is consistent with the *Action Plan for Jobs 2017* which plans for “200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside Dublin” and has prioritised the delivery of “strong competitive regions to drive regional employment”.⁸

3. A Place-Making Strategy

- 3.1 Waterford, in tandem with Cork and Limerick, is at lies within a region that is a credible counter-balance in terms of investment and population growth to Dublin. A co-ordinated approach to the development of Waterford in tandem with the

⁴ Source www.cso.ie, population as per 2016 census.

⁵ See IBEC, *Local Economic Indicators 2017: Doing Business Locally* (January 2017).

⁶ See <http://www.skillsireland.ie/Publications/2016/Regional-Labour-Markets-Bulletin-2016-Web-Presentation.pdf>.

⁷ See IBEC, *Local Economic Indicators 2017: Doing Business Locally* (January 2017).

⁸ See *Action Plan for Jobs 2017* p.8.

other two cities and, moreover, the development of the connections between them is vital and should be enabled by the National Planning Framework. All other national and regional plans, regional and local government structures, and infrastructural investment should be focussed on the development of this collaborative approach.

- 3.2 The Southern group of cities and their hinterlands has the capacity, credibility and capability to define itself as innovation-focussed and innovation-led, based on track record to date. This region can legitimately be described as a “learning region” in which its higher education institutions will play a lead role in developing its potential. (Approximately 66,000 students are enrolled at the various higher education institutions across Waterford, Cork and Limerick.⁹)
- 3.3 Significant and ongoing investment in enhancing the higher education infrastructure will greatly contribute not only to the economic development of the wider Southern region but will also significantly enhance the region’s (and nation’s) sustainability and resilience. Such resilience is vital if Ireland is to sustain itself in the midst of very dynamic global forces.¹⁰ The importance of deepening resilience, and the vital part played in developing resilience by higher education institutions, is widely recognised.¹¹
- 3.4 The regional cities should be the fulcra for future development. Waterford, in common with the other regional cities, has the capacity to develop and grow; indeed it has the capacity to double in size by 2040. This capacity must be embraced and the National Plan must focus on harnessing the latent potential within Waterford, Cork and Limerick, as counter-points to Dublin.
- 3.5 The further definition of these cities as “smart cities” will give expression to the overall value proposition of the region.¹² The track record of higher education institutions in particular in the region in technology-associated research, and the existence within the wider region of technology-based companies, suggests the designation of the cities as “smart” has credibility.
- 3.6 Notwithstanding, the South (Waterford, Cork, Limerick) will be a largely rural region with concentrations of population in the main cities and otherwise a widely dispersed population in isolated communities and small villages and towns. While it is envisaged that most economic activity will take place in the cities, it is impractical to expect citizens to abandon the countryside for the cities or for the State to invest in the “hard” infrastructure physically to connect every rural community across the region. Technology permits enormous flexibility in living and working environments. Investing in smart technology that can be dispersed widely in order to enable new ways of working and living, and therefore new ways of place-making, should form part of any future plan. Higher education institutions, such as WIT, as elements in the wider education system,

⁹ The most recent figures date from 2013-14 and are published by the HEA. The relevant HEIs are Waterford IT, UCC, University of Limerick, Limerick IT, IT Carlow, IT Tralee and Cork IT.

¹⁰ See Susan Christophersona et al, “Regional resilience: theoretical and empirical perspectives”, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* (2010), 3, 3–10.

¹¹ See *Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World*, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (March 2017), for instance.

¹² See Hans Schaffers et al, “Smart Cities as Innovation Ecosystems sustained by the Future Internet”, White Paper, April 2012: <https://hal.inria.fr/hal-00769635/document>

have an important role to play in the development of the concepts and tools to enable the emergence of coherence across a dispersed region through the use of technology. Technology can also be used to harness untapped innovation potential at local, community level.

- 3.7 The National Planning Framework should enable capacity building at local, community level. The Framework should facilitate and encourage social enterprise and should allow for the implementation of recent recommendations on how best to grow this sector.¹³ Vibrant local communities, connected with one another through technology, can be at the heart of the innovation region.
- 3.8 It is clear that the South, if defined in terms of innovation and technology, will aim to attract high-end employment and knowledge-intensive industries. The strengths of the consortium that is created by Waterford, Cork and Limerick will be in industries such as bio-pharmaceuticals, advanced manufacturing, and, reflecting the nature of the region, agriculture. (This is consistent with the *Action Plan for Jobs 2017* which recommends the development of the Agri-Marine sector amongst others.) The research effort of higher education institutions in the region should be aligned with these domains and incentivised by any future national plan.
- 3.9 Robust structures, in particular new local government structures and practices, will be needed to encourage alliances and collaboration between cities and across the region. The Framework will need to offer detail on what those structures might look like and the mechanisms by which the priorities of the Framework can be implemented. Higher education institutions can play a lead role as co-ordinators of effort across multiple sectors.
- 3.10 Any future planning must recognise the challenge of validating citizens' sense of place while also understanding the new ways place is constructed. Our understanding of place has changed considerably given the ubiquity of communications technology; imagined and "virtual" communities contribute to identity formation in ways unforeseen a generation ago. Technology offers the means to engage distributed populations in common activity and to permit new models for service delivery to these populations. Nonetheless, space in the world is an important expression of one's identity as an individual and is an important expression of the identity of a community. Higher education institutions such as WIT can offer much in conceptualising and understanding these new ways of making sense of place. Further research on place-making should be incentivised in future planning.

4. People's Health and Well-Being

- 4.1 The United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) recognises that citizens leading long and healthy lives is a reliable indicator of general societal well-being.¹⁴ The National Planning Framework will be right to place the health of citizens as an important element.

¹³ <https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Forf%C3%A1s/Social-Enterprise-in-Ireland-Sectoral-Opportunities-and-Policy-Issues.pdf>

¹⁴ See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>.

- 4.2 Future infrastructural investment must take account of the health benefits (or otherwise) in addition to the economic benefits (or otherwise) of the investment: clearly this will be demanded by a multi-dimensional focus on citizens' quality of life. The "Do Nothing" option of permitting the further growth of the Dublin commuter belt is unwarranted purely on health grounds.¹⁵ Mental as well as physical dimensions to health must be considered. The South of Ireland, with a development focus on the Waterford-Cork-Limerick triangle, should be configured in the Planning Framework as a more health-focussed region, given its emphasis on smart, technology- and innovation-led industrial activity, organisational structures and local government.
- 4.3 Access to health-care is a key measure of life quality. Infrastructural development with an emphasis on the health of the population must advance the capacity of citizens to access the care they need. The further development of University College Hospital Waterford and continued investment in local GP services across the region (as envisaged in the *Action Plan for Rural Development*) should be priorities in any development plan. Technology-led approaches to addressing the challenges of health-care access should be encouraged and facilitated (by investment) in the context of the South positioning itself as Ireland's innovation hub.

5. Ireland's Unique Environment

- 5.1 The cultivation and continuation of Ireland's unique environment—social, human and physical—should be at the heart of future planning; establishing Ireland's difference is the best way to ensure we continue to contribute internationally and continue to have international visibility. There needs to be recognition in any future planning of the constantly changing nature of Irishness and the continuing diversity of our population; this is a virtue that makes Ireland unique.
- 5.2 A strong concept of active citizenship and of collective responsibility for preserving our unique environment is a certain protection against further exploitation of that environment for short-term and selfish ends. Future planning needs to empower local communities to make changes in domains within their control. This will require greater investment in local government and changes in governance structures.
- 5.3 A focus on capacity building at local, community level, and investment in technology infrastructure to enable connectivity will maintain local rural communities as vibrant places to live. This is essential if rural areas are not to be hollowed out and become mere visitor attractions.

6. Equipping Ireland for Future Development—Infrastructure

- 6.1 The comments above suggest a range of infrastructural developments that should be prioritised over the coming period, as follows:

¹⁵ See Hansson, Erik et al. "Relationship between Commuting and Health Outcomes in a Cross-Sectional Population Survey in Southern Sweden." *BMC Public Health* 11 (2011): 834. *PMC*. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

- (a) Improved “hard” transport infrastructure to connect Waterford, Cork and Limerick is required. This will better support the further development of the South as a counterforce to Dublin.
- (b) Significant investment is required in the higher education infrastructure in the wider Southern region. An internationally competitive higher education system in the South will be the single greatest enabler of the development of the region’s innovation capacity. Two thirds of that system largely exists at the moment with strong universities in Limerick and Cork; greater investment therefore in Waterford’s higher education infrastructure would enable the wider region to be even more impactful.
- (c) There needs to be significant investment both in hard and soft infrastructure to enable the designation of the region as a technology-led region. This included investment in broadband and the telecommunications structures. In parallel, changes in work contracts (perhaps negotiated through employers groups) and in incentives for employers, while not infrastructural, nonetheless would be important developments to support the region’s designation. Investment in making the health provision in the region more accessible should be prioritised. Technology again enables access to health care in ways unforeseen until recently. The investment in the technology infrastructure therefore will also have a benefit in healthcare provision.

6.2 The development of the governance infrastructure particularly at local, county and regional levels is vital for any future plan. Strengthening of regional co-ordinating bodies will be important.

7. Enabling the Vision—Implementing the National Planning Framework

- 7.1 Quality of life indicators represent a reliable measure that can be used to monitor and evaluate future planning. It would be appropriate that the Framework specifies targets against the various indicators. These indicators ensure that quality of life, in all its dimensions, remains the focus of any future planning.
- 7.2 Legislation needs to follow the Framework to ensure alignment between local plans, sector-level plans, and national objectives. The governance and oversight arrangements for the Framework need to be specified.
- 7.3 Disseminating responsibility for implementing any future plans to the lowest level possible will ensure its effective implementation.