



Oifig an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna
Office of the Minister for Education and Skills

Mr. Bob Savage
Chairperson
Cork Institute of Technology

Mr. Lionel Alexander
Chairperson
Institute of Technology Tralee

30th September 2019

Munster Technological University (MTU) Consortium Application

Dear Chairpersons,

I am writing to you further in relation to the application made to me on behalf of the MTU consortium comprising Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) and Institute of Technology Tralee (ITT) on 12 February 2019 to become a Technological University and my subsequent letter of response of 22 July 2019.

I have received and considered the representations made by the MTU consortium on 20 August 2019 under section 34(3) of the Technological Universities Act 2018.

In accordance with section 34(4) of the 2018 Act, and in consideration of your representations together with the advisory panel recommendation for the provision of a six-month period for the Institutes to prepare further, data, information and evidence, I am confirming my proposed decision to postpone the granting of the application by making an order under the TU Act establishing the MTU.

The reasons for my decision in this matter are the assessments, findings and recommendations contained in the report of the advisory panel which was endorsed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in its letter to me accompanying the advisory panel's report, dated July 9 2019.

In line with sections 35(1) and 35(2) of the Technological Universities Act, 2018, I am also specifying conditions in this letter with which your institutes are required to jointly comply in order to meet the eligibility criteria of the Act and the period of time within which the conditions shall be met.

These conditions shall be complied with at a time determined by the submission of a final report on their achievement by the consortium, no later than the end of Q1 2020.



1. Progress towards the preparation of an overarching statement of the strategic purpose of and vision for the proposed MTU to be demonstrated, as proposed by the advisory panel, through the completion of a profile statement for MTU and the identification of the benefits of the new institution, demonstrating a commitment to the establishment of a cohesive, integrated and unitary multi-campus TU.

1.1 This should include consideration of MTU's foundational role in creating a regional institution and developing it along the N22 corridor and also set out how it is envisaged that the analysis contained in the report of the Technological Universities Research Network is relevant to the future value, mission and purpose of the proposed MTU.

2. A detailed process of engagement with all stakeholder groups – internal and external - relating to the development of a clear shared vision and mission for the proposed TU as a single cohesive and unitary multi-campus TU and a plan for the continuation of this engagement prior to the establishment of MTU and post-designation.

3. In order to ensure the attainment of a strategic purpose and vision and to meet the eligibility criteria set out in section 28(1)(k)(i), and in consideration of the factors that were essential to the successful establishment of TU Dublin, the applicant institutes should demonstrate that:-

3.1 a joint governing body steering group has been established for the proposed MTU of the main stakeholders in both institutes as soon as possible following the receipt of this letter to provide a single focal point, accelerated momentum and strongly evidenced progress in responding to the issues highlighted in the advisory panel's report, including , that more integrated, coherent and effective governance structures are required in preparation for a single legal entity.

3.2 this joint steering group has been ceded on its establishment appropriate delegated authority from the governing bodies of both institutes to secure an integrated, coherent and effective approach and significant progress in relation to academic, administrative, management and governance matters required for the establishment of a TU.

3.3 the joint steering group has worked effectively in terms of establishing an integrated, coherent and effective approach to the matters referred to in 3.1 and 3.2 above and a comprehensive and detailed work programme is in place for the steering group up to the point of a decision to grant the application and for the continuation of this work following a decision up to the point that a TU is established.

3.4 the joint steering group has been supported from the outset by senior personnel drawn from the individual institutes and operating across both institutes and external experts having specialist expertise and knowledge of higher education and mandated by both institutes' governing bodies to provide executive leadership for the steering group's programme of work including through the establishment and operation of appropriate sub-groups.

4. In order to meet the eligibility criteria set out in section 30(b) of the Act and on the basis of the work of the joint steering group and sub-groups which it establishes the applicant institutes should demonstrate on the basis of additional and specific data, evidenced information that specific joint planning in relation to a future single unitary institution is effective and advancing and will continue to the point that the TU is established in relation to the management of:-

- (a) academic;**
- (b) financial; and**
- (c) and administrative matters, including human resources, information technology and support services;**

4.1 Insofar as academic matters are concerned, the applicant institutes should demonstrate that a process has been put in place, involving academic staff and students and that progress has been made towards a proposed future approach to programme offerings in anticipation of the establishment of MTU .

5. Quantitative Eligibility Criteria

5.1 Demonstration by the applicant institutes that they meet the eligibility criterion in section 28 (1)(a)(i) of the Act on the basis of a definition of "research students" to be determined and agreed with the HEA / QQI, consistent with the national position.

5.2 Provision by the applicant institutes of a plan in relation to the eligibility criterion in section 28(1)(a)(iii) to increase the percentage of research students from 4% to 7% within ten years.

5.3 Provision by the applicant institutes of a plan, in relation to the eligibility criterion in section 28(1)(d) to increase the percentage of full-time academic staff with a doctoral or appropriate equivalent from at least 45% to 65% within 10 years.

6. The furnishing of progress reports to the Minister at three month intervals following the date of issue of this letter in relation to compliance with these conditions.

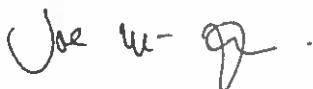
My proposed decision on compliance with these conditions under section 35 (1) (b) will be made having consulted with the HEA and QQI and an advisory panel similar to that which carried out the assessment of the application for TU designation under section 29 of the Act.

I also note that the report of the advisory panel raised questions regarding the resolution of financial deficits at ITT stating that the panel did not receive information about plans to address them. I understand that the HEA is currently awaiting a stability and sustainability plan in respect of ITT, to be finalised by the end of this month. On receipt of this plan the HEA will be required to assess it and engage further with the Institute, if necessary, to secure further measures in the plan. I will be advised of the assessment by the HEA and, subject to a positive assessment and an endorsement by HEA of the plan, I propose to initiate a working group to consider the requirement for additional funding support to respond to the systemic structural weaknesses of the Institute. These weaknesses reflect, for example, the Institute's small size, peripheral location, the demographic profile of its catchment area and the high level of competition it experiences from other HEIs in the region. The Working Group will be composed of all key stakeholders and consistent with the similar approaches adopted previously for other institutions that have experienced financial difficulty. A major element of the work of this group will be to assess how the potential transition to a TU provides opportunities to significantly strengthen the profile and offering in Tralee.

As manifested in the high-level of financial support provided to date to ITT the Government is committed to the continued provision of higher education in Tralee. In that context, there is no question that the actions to secure a resolution to the financial difficulties in IT Tralee would be expected to give rise to creation of a potential financial burden that would have the effect of undermining the financial stability and sustainability of the potential MTU.

Finally, I wish to advise to that in accordance with section 34(5) of the 2018 Act the applicant institutes may, jointly, under Part 3 of the 2018 Act, appeal this decision, including any of the specified conditions, within 30 days of the date of this letter. In such a circumstance my decision will be suspended until, as the case may be, the decision becomes final under section 34(6), or the disposal of an appeal under Part 3.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe McHugh'.

Joe McHugh TD
Minister for Education and Skills

c.c.

Dr. Barry O'Connor, President, Cork Institute of Technology

Dr. Brendan O'Donnell, President, Institute of Technology Tralee

Dr. Don Thornhill, Independent Chair of the MTU Consortium