

Mr Joe McHugh, T.D.,
Minister for Education and Skills,
Department of Education and Skills,
Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1.

09th July 2019

Dear Minister,

I refer to your letter of 5th April 2019, inviting the Higher Education Authority to convene an Advisory Panel to consider an application under section 32 of the Technological Universities Act, 2018. I am pleased to report that the Advisory Panel met in late-May and its report was considered by An tÚdarás (the Board of the Authority) on July 2nd 2019.

Section 32 of the 2018 Act sets out that the Advisory Panel, having assessed the application, shall furnish a report to An tÚdarás with a recommendation whether to make an order for technological university designation. The Act (section 33) requires that '*An tÚdarás, having had regard to the eligibility criteria and the report, shall furnish the following to the Minister:*

- (a) the report,*
- (b) the views of An tÚdarás regarding the report, and*
- (c) any other information that An tÚdarás considers relevant'.*

The report and recommendations of the Advisory Panel are attached.

An tÚdarás welcomes the report of the Advisory Panel as a thorough analysis in terms of the legislative requirements as set out in the 2018 Act and thanks the Advisory Panel and Deloitte (who carried out a metrics analysis) for their work in support of this process.

Having reviewed and discussed the report, with the Panel Chair in attendance, at its recent meeting, An tÚdarás submits the following views and recommendations regarding the report to you for consideration:

- That no order under section 36 be made at this time, and in accordance with section 34 (4) (b) of the 2018 Act, that you should, '*postpone, subject to compliance with conditions under section 35, the granting of the application and the making of the order under section 36*';
 - This is based on the Advisory Panel recommendation "*that the Minister request additional and specific data and information 'demonstrating that plans and arrangements are in place for managing academic, financial, and*

administrative matters arising on the making of an order under section 36' and that these data and information explicitly address the criteria above on which the panel finds itself unable to make a judgment regarding compliance".

And

- That in accordance with section 32 (2), the Advisory Panel found that *"with respect to the threshold criteria, preparedness and capacity to function as a new technological university the panel finds that the MTU proposal partially meets the requirements set out in the Technological Universities Act, 2018, but leaves questions unanswered regarding the specifics of how the two applicant institutions are to become one"*.

An tÚdarás, having regard to section 33(c) of the 2018 Act, further considers the following information relevant:

- The financial situation of the Institute of Technology, Tralee remains a significant ongoing concern for An tÚdarás. A coherent plan to return the Institute to a more stable financial footing should be a prerequisite for any merger and subsequent designation.
- That the Advisory Panel:
 - found *"there is a lack of clear vision and strategy for MTU"*;
 - expected *"joint planning would have been further along and more specific regarding a future single institution given the amount of time that has gone into the CIT/ITT collaboration to become MTU"*;
 - did not see a plan demonstrating *"the capacity within ten years to increase the percentage of research students from 4.0 per cent to at least 7.0 per cent"*.
- An tÚdarás would propose a further external review and site visit to consider the revised plans and data to be submitted by the consortium, as recommended by the Advisory Panel. This review, of plans towards development and implementation of a technological university, should look at how the consortium has addressed the comments and advice set out in the independent Advisory Panel's report, as well as the issues set out here.

You will note the Advisory Panel's recommendation *"that the Minister request additional and specific data and information"*, within a six-month period. We believe that the suggested timeline of six months, to submit the required evidence, is too ambitious and should be extended. We recommend that an assessment of an appropriate timeline be undertaken.

We recommend that Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), be requested to carry out, or bring forward, planned external reviews of the two institutions, in advance of any final decision on the proposed technological university, as we believe this is the correct sequence for reviews. Having reports of such institutional quality reviews available would assist both technological university applicants in making their case for designation and advisory panels in their deliberations on such applications.

Returning to the Advisory Panel's findings in respect of compliance with section 30 of the 2018 Act (eligibility), An tÚdarás shares the Advisory Panel's view in respect of "*areas deserving of further definition and clarification in national policy related to the technological university and tertiary education in general*";

- the need for a commonly understood definition of *research* and *research-active* students and staff;
- the need for a commonly understood distinction between what are understood to be either *taught* or *research* master's degrees.

Finally, as regards incorporations, mergers and higher education landscape reform more generally, including the development of Technological Universities, An tÚdarás notes that the Department of Education and Skills and the HEA, has since 2013, allocated €35.53 million to landscape reform. This funding included c. €20m to the successfully completed DCU incorporation and TU Dublin projects. While the HEA carries out ongoing monitoring of spend and is committed to ex-post reviews of landscape projects, An tÚdarás now suggests a fuller mid-term review of this funding would be appropriate. The HEA executive will communicate further with your officials in this regard.

I trust the attached Advisory Panel report and the comments above will assist you in making your decision on this application for designation as a technological university under the 2018 Act.

We look forward to engaging with you further on this process if required and remain happy to assist in any way.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Horgan', with a horizontal line underneath the first part of the signature.

Michael Horgan,
Chairman.