

Mr Simon Harris, T.D.,
Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science,
Leeson Lane,
Dublin,
D02 TR60.

13th September 2021

RE: CUA Consortium Technological University Application, May 2021

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Board of An tÚdarás, I wish to report that the Advisory Panel completed its work and submitted its report for consideration by An tÚdarás at its meeting of 7th of September 2021, as specified under Section 29 of the Technological Universities Act, 2018.

The Advisory Panel's report and recommendations are attached and the views of An tÚdarás, regarding the report and any other information that An tÚdarás considers relevant, are set out below.

We are pleased to inform you that the Panel has recommended that the CUA consortium should be designated a Technological University under the *Technological Universities Act, 2018*. An tÚdarás supports the Advisory Panel's report and would like to make the following recommendations.

The views of An tÚdarás regarding the report:

- An tÚdarás notes and echoes the Advisory Panel's positive findings in respect of the application, in particular:
 - The depth of evidence of strong links with business, enterprise, the professions, the community, local interests and other stakeholders in the region;
 - The strength of the response to local and regional needs through programme development and lifelong learning activity;
 - The inclusive nature of internal engagement structures with effective consultation with staff and student unions.

An tÚdarás supports the specific recommendations of the Panel in respect of this application:

- Organisation design
 - The consortium should consider further the articulation of the proposed transitional organisational structure and the functions and responsibilities of the colleges structure within the new unitary TU, particularly as distinct from

the arrangements in place in the three separate and autonomous institutions of the consortium. The new TU should not be perceived as a continuation of the existing institutes. The organisational model should be a major point of attention in the immediate period post-designation and the model should be reviewed a few years following designation.

- Research
 - There is a need to develop a clear strategy to sustainably build research capacity, and to re-examine current research structures post-designation to enable the consortium to meet the research ambitions for the sector.
- Regional engagement
 - Regional responsiveness should be a cornerstone of the new TU, building on existing relationships, networks, and strengths of the three institutes and the consortium. The diversity of the region which the new TU occupies will present particular challenges, and the structures to support enterprise engagement within the region must reflect and respect this diversity.

An tÚdarás strongly endorses this Panel’s comments on national level supports critical to the success of a new TU, which echo the recommendations in previous TU Panel reports:

- As An tÚdarás has indicated previously, the successful development of technological universities will require a longer-term commitment in terms of supporting infrastructure, short to medium term funding (5-10 years), and support for research capacity building, in line with the ambitions of the 2018 Act.
- It is imperative to reform the existing staff contract to enable a balance of teaching, research and engagement apposite to a TU. The ongoing Review of Technological University Academic Contracts, Career Paths and Organisation Design currently being undertaken by the OECD is referenced by the Panel as a support in this context.

You will be aware Minister, that the 2018 Act sets out a trajectory in respect of staff qualifications. An tÚdarás notes the various approaches to PhD equivalence across all TU applications to date, and the implementation of the previous recommendation that applicant consortia would commission an external expert review of the credentials of academic staff deemed by the applicant institutions to have the equivalency of doctoral level preparation. In the case of the CUA application, the panel relied on and were assisted by the external report provided by the consortium in this regard.

It is accepted that the issue of equivalence is a transitional issue, however An tÚdarás is cognisant of the potential impact of equivalence on the longer term research agenda signalled within the TU Act, 2018 in terms of staff qualifications and research activity. Further, while An tÚdarás understands the specific context for equivalence in respect of a TU application we advise caution in respect of any broader approach to equivalency for doctoral-level preparation given the value attached to the doctoral degree both nationally and internationally.

We trust the attached Report of the Advisory Panel 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". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Michael Horgan
Chairman