

## Progress Report 3

### *Governance, operational arrangements and communications.*

- The Joint Governing Bodies Steering Group met on 15 December and received progress reports from the Executive Project Director and each of the workstreams. The Group noted the substantial progress that had been made in recent months, the considerable work still to be completed and the need for maintaining the momentum and continued commitment from all concerned.
- The joint executives group has continued to meet on a fortnightly basis.
- Following on the appointment of consultants to advise on branding and related issues, the recruitment process for a brand manager has commenced. This is an open competition and the appointee will be responsible for implementing the strategy for all brand implementation, marketing, digital communications and social media for the establishment of the TUSEI.
- There has been a delay in appointing an engagement manager. However, interviews were held on 15 January and an appointment made. The appointee will take a lead role in ensuring effective communication and engagement with the staff and students of the institutes, as well as supporting external engagement activities.
- A second virtual workshop is to be conducted on 25 January on the theme of internationalisation in a higher education context. It will be delivered by Eva Egron-Polak, Former Secretary General and Senior Fellow, International Association of Universities.
- The presidents of the institutes conducted a virtual information session/townhall with staff and another with students on 14 December. Over 300 staff joined the session. There was a much lower participation from students, indicating a need to put in place engagement and communication approaches more suitable to their interests and schedules. It is intended to conduct such information sessions on a fortnightly basis from January onwards. Future sessions will be led by two workstream leads on each occasion. The aim is for the leads to outline progress in the project plans, identifying the issues that are being addressed and seeking views from the participants. In this way there is the potential for a greater sharing of information and participation in the development of the TU by a wider group.

## **2. Application process**

A schedule has been agreed at Steering Group level for the submission of an application to the Minister for designation as a TU. Key milestones are –

28 April 2021	Making of application to the Minister.
21 – 26 April	Consideration of application document by governing bodies
14 – 21 April	Consideration by Steering Group
8 – 12 March	Review of application by preparatory panel
1 March	Draft of the application document (as it stands then) to be submitted to the preparatory panel.

Work has commenced on a review of the current draft of the application document. It is led by the presidents, together with the leadership group. It is now over a year since the current document was completed, so in many respects it is dated. It also does not address major recent developments, such as the Covid pandemic and the implications for the TU. The vision, values and mission stated in the document will continue to inform the application. The current work of review is focussing on the statements made under mission and aiming, through the work of the working groups, to set out in concrete terms how the TU will deliver on each of them.

## **3. Data and preparatory audit**

As noted in the December report, in preparation for formal audit of student and staff data to ensure compliance with the statutory TU criteria, the institutes are undertaking a full preparatory audit, which begins on 18 January. Deloitte (which carried out the formal audit for MTU and TU Dublin) have been engaged as the auditors. All data has now been collected and collated across the institutes with data now in place for 2019/20 student data, and 2020 data for staff and for research metrics. The data aligns with the HEA and indicate that the institutes comfortably meet the statutory criteria.

## **4. Regional Engagement Advisory Group**

The December report noted the plan to establish a Regional Engagement Forum with its first meeting scheduled for early January. The terms of reference, including the membership, have been agreed and are attached at Appendix 1. The bodies who are to nominate members have been asked for their nominees by 8 January. As at the time of preparing this report, most have done so. There is a high level of interest in joining the group, reflecting the high level of interest at regional level to the development of TUSEI. While it had been planned to hold a first meeting of the group in early January it is now planned for the week of 25 January. As noted in the December report, it is

intended that this group will meet regularly, and will form the embryo of on-going structured engagement between the TU and the South East region.

## **5. Project Plans**

The attached Appendix 2 sets out the current state of progress on each of the priority deliverables in the TUSEI project plan. So far activity has focussed substantially on documenting existing policies and procedures and aligning them across the two institutes e.g., policies re student services. In some groups e.g., graduate attributes, graduate school and academic council, work is progressing on identifying good practice in other jurisdictions – the multi campus workstream have completed their work in this respect and will now carry it forward into developing best practice for the TUSEI. The working groups have also identified interdependencies across the eight workstreams and have, or are, developing approaches to dealing with these.

Work is progressing on mapping established collaborations as well as identifying opportunities for new collaborations. Notable in this context, as noted in the December report, is that TUSEI's first joint scholarship scheme (named the South East Development Fund) launched which will see 12 PhD jointly supervised scholars (WIT/ITC) commence their studies during Q1 2021. In another collaboration, IT Carlow with WIT as a partner, together with LIT and Carlow College, have been successful in receiving funding under the HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund 2020. The funding is for the development and implementation of a Gender Identity, Expression & Diversity Training Programme for staff in Irish HEIs. A third significant collaborative development arises in the context of the Human Capital Initiative where the joint project {"Realising the potential of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and lifelong learning in Irish higher education – a national initiative in collaboration with enterprise"} has been approved for significant funding (Innovation and Agility) Pillar 3.

The student's unions continue to progress their agenda very successfully with an amalgamated structure for TUSEISU designed, as well as a Class Representative System for the amalgamated Students' Union and an interim logo developed for the joint union. There is also ongoing work on collaborative projects and in communicating with their members on the importance of the TU.

The completion of collecting and collating the data on staff and students for the purpose of assessing the extent to which the consortium meets the statutory criteria is an important milestone. This is a key qualifying requirement and a very large body of work with many elements which is now ready for a preparatory audit.

The progress on branding is also especially noteworthy. This is not a cosmetic exercise. It involves the centrally important issue of deciding on the name of the TU and developing a substantial promotional campaign for the new university to attract students, staff, research and funding.

Overall, there is a high level of engagement with the priorities in the project plan. It is reasonable at this point that most effort has been given over to establishing baseline information and practices in each institute and harvesting examples of good practice elsewhere. This stage will now need to quickly transition into developing policies and practices specifically for the TUSEI with clear plans for development of the TU up to the advisory panel review and beyond. Achieving this sets a very challenging agenda for staff, who also have to continue to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic and their usual workload. It will require continuation of the strong momentum and commitment demonstrated to date.

*Tom Boland*

18 January 2021

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **TUSEI Regional Engagement Advisory Group Terms of reference**

A TU has a special relationship and role with regard to the region in which it is based. The TURN report speaks of TUs “fuelling balanced regional development” and serving as an “anchor institution” to promote a sustainable strategy for social, cultural and economic development, and the national and international advancement of its region. A high level of engagement already exists between the Institute of Technology Carlow, Waterford Institute of Technology and regional stakeholders and the TUSEI consortium have set engagement with stakeholders as one of the eight pillar workstreams of the TU project. Under that workstream, two working groups are focussing specifically on regional engagement and civic and cultural engagement. The working groups have identified the value of establishing, as a permanent feature of the TU, a South East Assembly (similar to Citizens’ Assembly). The value of engaging regional stakeholders in developing policy and practice in relation to regional engagement and the proposed Assembly at this point in time is recognised. To that end it is proposed to establish a core advisory group with immediate effect. The group (the TUSEI Regional Engagement Advisory Group) will focus specifically on the development of regional engagement by TUSEI up to the establishment of the Assembly itself (although the retention of this core group in addition to the Assembly should be considered). The objectives are to provide advice and support to the TUSEI consortium -

- in the creation of a framework for on-going structured and effective dialogue, collaboration and innovation between TUSEI and key stakeholders across the region;
- in identifying appropriate shared objectives, rooted in a robust and shared analysis of regional needs and opportunities, and co-created with regional partners;
- in identifying how regional engagement can be designed from the outset into the TUSEI processes of teaching and learning, research and innovation;
- in identifying opportunities for the TUSEI consortium and the regional stakeholders to co-commission activities and deliver outcomes for developing the sustainability of the region.

The TUSE Regional Engagement Advisory Group will –

1. Be chaired jointly by the Presidents of IT Carlow and WIT;
2. Have the following members –
  - the leaders of the TUSEI engagement workstream and the co-chairs of the working groups,

- one nominee from each of the following –  
South East IBEC, South East ISME, the South East Regional Skills Forum, the Chair of the South East City and County Managers Group, the Chambers of Commerce in Waterford and in Carlow; the South East Chambers Group, the South East ETBs, the South East Regional Executive, the South East Engineering Cluster, the South East Technology Cluster and the South East Financial Services Cluster. In order to achieve a gender balance each nominating body will nominate a male and female nominee unless, for stated reasons, this is not practical
3. Meet regularly, and not less than every two months;
  4. Agree an MOU which supports collaborative decision-making and processes which can translate the objectives into practical activities that can realise regional and public benefit. This MOU will form the basis for the work of the South East Assembly once established;
  5. Identify the resources required to deliver the process effectively;
  6. Design a process through which impact will be tracked and risks identified.

*December 2020*