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News

Four Dublin institutes of technology seek joint redesignation

Sean Flynn

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FOUR INSTITUTES of technology in Dublin are to make a joint bid for redesignation as a new-style “technological university”.

The move comes ahead of tomorrow’s publication of the Government-commissioned Hunt Report on the third-level sector.

This rules out the establishment of any new universities but holds out the prospect of some institutes being redesignated as technological universities provided strict criteria are met.

The Hunt Report also rejects the demand by the 14 institutes in the State for a single federal national technological university. Instead it favours the institutes working in regional clusters as essentially junior partners to the universities.

The four seeking redesignation are the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, and the Institute of Technology Tallaght.

DIT has been seeking university status as it prepares to relocate to a new €1 billion Grangegorman campus over the next decade. However, the Hunt Report rules out university status for DIT and for two other colleges seeking it – the institutes of technology in Cork and Waterford.

The four major colleges – representing “more than 12 per cent of all higher education in Ireland” – plan to work towards creating “what will be the university of the future – a civic and technological institution providing a world class experience for students, develop graduates who will respond to the needs of society, and will stand with the leaders among the technological universities across Europe and worldwide”.

The senior leadership teams of the four higher education institutions will meet this morning to draw up the road map to achieve this objective.

Last night the new group said it “fully accepted the Hunt recommendation that there is no need for yet another traditional university in Ireland but we welcome its support for enabling the creation of a new type of institution”.

“We envisage that what will emerge will be a civic and technological university with a nationally unique profile that will constitute a significant addition to Irish higher education.”

The Dublin institutes promise to offer students a comprehensive range of clear, distinctive options.

They also express confidence their submission will meet all the criteria outlined by Hunt for redesignation.

In recent years there has been criticism that the institutes of technology – formerly regional technical colleges – have moved away from their original mission of supporting industry. All now offer an extensive range of arts and humanities courses.

The Hunt Report says the field of learning in any new technological universities must be “closely related to labour market skill needs with a particular focus on programmes in science, engineering and technology and including an emphasis on workplace learning”.

There may be a case, it says, for “facilitating the evolution of some existing institutes following a process of consolidation into a form of university that is different in mission from the existing Irish universities”.

Hunt says there are strong arguments against simply making changes to the names of institutions. Any such changes could, if allowed, lead to confusion internationally as to the roles and mission of Irish institutions. From an international perspective the designation of an institution as a “university” or as an “institute of technology” does not confer any obvious distinction of status – two of the 10 internationally highest-ranked institutions are institutes of technology. More generally, title changes are often seen as inevitable

precursors to changes of mission, and this carries the risk that important parts of the particular mission of the institutes of technology will be lost.

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