

Waterford must overcome university sector's "cosy cartel"

The "I'm alright Jack" attitude displayed by comments made last week by Danny O'Hare in defending his own territory – for that is what he was doing – illustrate quite clearly for us in the south east the level of opposition from within the cosy cartel of the university sector to our region attaining what is rightfully ours. So says Independent Waterford City Councillor Mary Roche.

Mr. O'Hare, former Director of WIT and former President of Dublin City University, has voiced opposition to a university in Waterford, saying he supported instead a newly focused Institute of Technology in the belief that US investors are far more impressed with IT graduates than those from a university with an international reputation.

"Mr O'Hare would have us believe that a university is not what us little people down here in the south east need – as if he knows better – despite several economic and academic reports and testimonies to the contrary. It might lead someone to conclude that Mr O'Hare and his cohorts, cosy in their University Ivory Towers, have something to worry about from the dynamics that creating a new university in the south east might cause", contended Cllr Roche. "Could it be," she asked, "that the universities don't want their little cart upset or challenged – or eclipsed? Can it be little old Waterford's fault that none of our Irish Universities make it to the top of the pile of international recognition? Or can it be that they have had things their own way for so long that they don't want anyone challenging them or highlighting their inefficiencies"?

"Waterford IT, performing as it does with so many constraints, cannot fail to upset the apple cart once those constraints are removed and it has every intention of continuing in an ambitious vein, competing in the university sector, so it is perhaps understandable that people like Danny O'Hare will attempt to prevent our entry into what they see as 'their' sector. It can be the only explanation, in the face of all the mounting economic and academic evidence to the contrary, that Mr O'Hare wants to keep us in our place.

"While every other region benefits from both a university and IT provision," continued Roche "we in the south east should not? What else can be his logic? Look at the figures. Last week's papers detailed graphically how Cork has outperformed us (out of scale) on job creation and the attraction of inward investment. Yet we should not be given the tools to help us improve our attractiveness as a region? Danny O'Hare and his ilk say that's good enough for us.

"I don't even want to get into the figures for Third Level investment in the regions, or for Research & Development funding, as they are even more depressing – but Danny O'Hare thinks that we here in Waterford and the south east should be happy with the crumbs we get from their feast.

"It's a bit much to take," contends Cllr Roche, "to hear what can really only be described as fat-cat-I'm-alright university types telling us that what's good enough for them is too good for us. They are doing no more than defending their own territory and we should not allow it to deflect us away from our ultimate aim – equality with every other region in the country. In fact, it should steel our resolve now that the objectors are going public and we can see them for what they are – those who would like to keep us in our place as they see it, and keep the university places for themselves".