

IT lecturers support suspension of merger

The trade union representing lecturers at both Waterford and Carlow ITs has formally lodged a dispute with the Labour Relations Commission over the lack of consultation regarding the proposed merger of the two ITs.

Representatives from the Teachers' Union of Ireland branches (IT Carlow and Waterford IT) met last Wednesday to discuss the situation, with teaching staff of both ITs agreeing that all merger activities should remain suspended – and that adequate time and space should be provided to allow for appropriate academic engagement and analysis.

Both branches have agreed that they are united in their support for the realisation of a Technological University for the region and that the existing robust academic criteria should remain in place.

Concern was expressed at the meeting over the lack of resources put into the merger process to date. Objections were also raised over the 'unwarranted' level of political interference in the process, while serious disquiet was expressed over the lack of consultation with the union on the matter.

The branches have agreed that, if meaningful consultation is not initiated and resourced, members will be balloted.

In the meantime, the union is seeking a meeting with the Minister and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on the matter.

Meanwhile, Carlow IT President Dr Patricia Mulcahy, has spoken of her 'surprise and disappointment' with WIT's decision to withdraw from the merger process with her Institute.

Dr Mulcahy referred to the two-year process which had been entered into by both ITC and WIT and spoke of her regret that this had now been brought to a halt.

While Carlow IT remains committed to creating a Technological University of the South East, and this newspaper understands that both Education Minister Jan O'Sullivan and HEA are anxious for WIT to re-engage with Carlow.

Interestingly, former DCU President Professor Ferdinand Von Prondzinski believes WIT has the in-house academic wherewithal and professional expertise to stand alone as Ireland's newest university.

Meanwhile, support for a possible alliance between Waterford and Cork IT, which could lead to the establishment of a 'University of Munster' is understood to be growing among academics.

However, officially at least, both of the above ideas remain non-runners with the Department of Education and the HEA, while Cork IT says it remains committed to a merger with Tralee IT.

A special meeting of Waterford City & County Council will be held in Dungarvan this (Tuesday) evening to specifically discuss the current situation with WIT and what lies ahead in relation to its potential upgrading.