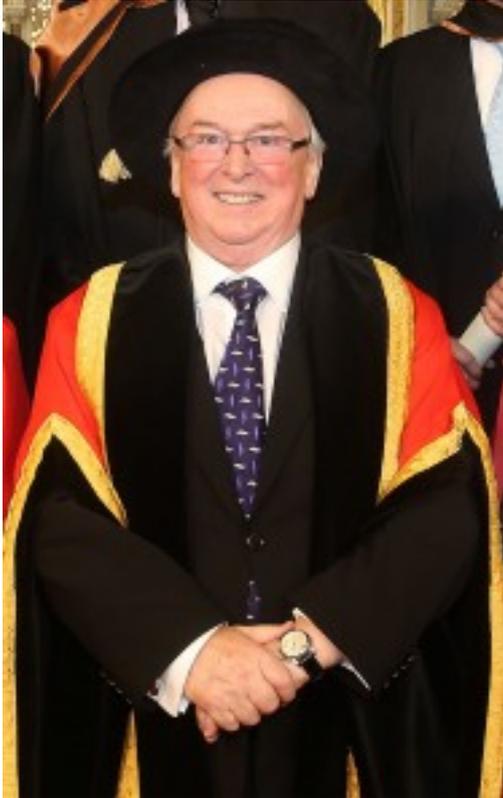


WIT CHAIR EDGED OUT IN FALLOUT

Minister didn't ask Donie Ormonde to stay on



Appointed as WIT Chairman in 2011, Donie Ormonde stood down from that post with immediate effect on Tuesday of last week.

The outgoing Chairman of Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) was effectively edged into retirement last week, despite Education Minister Jan O'Sullivan publicly stating that this was not the case.

In his only extensive print interview following his retirement on Tuesday last, Dr Ormonde stressed to The Munster Express that it was not a case of "my being shown the door" by Minister O'Sullivan.

However, when asked if the new Minister had asked him to remain in the role as the Government seeks to re-invigorate the potential WIT/IT Carlow merger, Dr Ormonde said: "No, she did not."

When asked to further clarify those comments, i.e. was he asked to step down or had he chosen to step down now, despite his term running until February 2016, Dr Ormonde replied: "To be honest, it was a combination of both of those factors."

As for the currently suspended merger process with IT Carlow, which had been set in train in the hope of creating a Technological University (TU) of the South East, the outgoing WIT Chair admitted that "we have had a lot of difficulties with Carlow, particularly in relation to the [TU application] criteria over the past six to eight months".

Stressing his "huge regard" for IT Carlow and the high esteem in which he holds its President Patricia Mulcahy ("an exceptional lady"), Dr Ormonde said the mixed signals which emerged inside the past month regarding the location of a TU Headquarters had negatively affected the process.

"We'd actually signed a Memorandum Of Agreement (MOA) towards the end of September, but then the issue with regards to the location of a Headquarters for any new entity emerged, and our Board had reached the conclusion that any such Headquarters had to be in Waterford."

Dr Ormonde continued: "And for us, to have the Headquarters here made perfect sense. After all, we're the gateway city, we're the capital of the south east, it's the bigger institution anyway, so it all pointed towards such an office being in Waterford."

"But Carlow were resistant to that, so eventually, in the MOA, we came up with a formula of words that suited both sides: that the President's principal office would be based in Waterford; in fact the word 'Headquarters' was never used but things took a turn for the worse when Carlow released a statement of their own in which they claimed that, in agreement with Waterford, that there was to be no Headquarters. All hell broke loose. To be frank, we were absolutely incensed."

"This press release was never agreed on; in fact it was in breach of a Memorandum Of Understanding we'd signed two years previously that there would be no unilateral press releases, and that there would only be joint press releases...but in the wake

of that press release, we immediately called a meeting of our Board and we agreed to suspend the process with Carlow until we got some feedback on what was going on."

Did he have any idea why IT Carlow embarked on a solo run with the media, Dr Ormonde said: "I don't know and I don't understand what motivated it. We had accommodated them in the formation and wording of the statement, so why they did that? I just don't know."

Referring to the telling (but now withdrawn) report prepared by Professor John Taylor of the University of Liverpool with respect to where both Institutes stood in relation to the TU application process, Dr Ormonde said his conclusions were of enormous significance. "Basically, as is now well known, Professor Taylor felt that Waterford, as a sole entity, was close to achieving the criteria, that we would reach the criteria within 12 to 15 months, whereas Carlow was much further down to track in achieving the same: five to seven years or maybe even longer - and our academics were extremely worried about that."

Dr Ormonde continued: "Waterford IT is readily recognised as one of the leading Institutes of Technology in the country right now, and our academics felt a merger of that duration would do untold reputational damage to Waterford - they were very insistent on this.

"And when the (Taylor) report came to light, there was a lot of anger, particularly on behalf of both the Department of Education and from Carlow. Ultimately, John Taylor, under pressure - and I'm not saying where that pressure came from - withdrew his initial report. He was very honourable in his dealings with both us and with Carlow; he charged no fees over the course of four trips to both Waterford and Carlow.

"John Taylor was recommended to us from someone within the Higher Education Authority (HEA) - I'm not in a position to say by whom - yet the whole point of his report was to be absolutely impartial in assessing both ITs, and then he felt he had to withdraw it. Why, you have to wonder?"

In relation to Dr Ormonde's retirement, a WIT spokesperson said: "Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) today (November 4th) learned that Dr Donal Ormonde has stepped down as Chair of the Institute with immediate effect. The Institute community would like to thank Dr Ormonde for his considerable commitment and efforts on behalf of the Institute over the last four years and we wish him well in the future."

In her own statement, issued 24 hours after meeting with Dr Ormonde, Minister O'Sullivan said the outgoing WIT Chair had made the decision to step down so as to permit "new blood to accompany the new process of consultation which will reinvigorate this process".

According to a Department of Education spokesperson: "Dr Ormonde feels that he has brought the project as far as he can and believes that the time is now right for a new face to progress it to a successful conclusion."

Said Minister O'Sullivan: "Donie Ormonde has left a lasting legacy in Waterford Institute of Technology. His commitment to the institution and to the students and staff in particular has been a hallmark of his tenure at the helm of WIT.

"Donie leaves WIT with its reputation as a leading third level institution enhanced as both WIT and Carlow now chart a new course for third-level education in the South East."

Donie Ormonde served as a Fianna Fáil TD in Waterford from 1982 to 1987 and as Senator from 1989 to 1992, was appointed as WIT Chairman in 2011 in succession to Redmond O'Donoghue.

"Once I'd made my decision, I felt a weight lifting off my shoulders," he said. "In fact, I had my first full night's sleep in six months in the immediate wake of my retirement, so taking that into account; I'd have to say I'm relieved in a sense."