

Botched 'TU' merger costs run to €400,000



Almost €400,000 has been spent to date on the planned merger between Waterford's Institute of Technology and IT Carlow, which was suspended late last year when the former institute pulled out of the negotiations.

Last week's Oireachtas Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was told that the negotiations were at a 'delicate' stage and it would not be helpful 'to bring all the reasons why the process broke down into open public discussion and have a broad-ranging debate about it'.

The comments were made in response to Fine Gael's John Deasy saying nobody seemed to know "what is going on in these institutions".

Deputy Deasy had called for a "drilling down into the governing bodies to find out what can be rescued from this".

The PAC heard that WIT has a debt of €8.2 million, mainly due to an overrun on the building of new student accommodation at Carriganore. That project was originally estimated to cost €2.5 million but is now being budgeted at €7 million.

Last October, WIT opted out of 'all activities' in the joint bid for technological-university status after a report commissioned by the college and subsequently withdrawn said the merger would hinder rather than help its bid for university status and delay the process for several years. Education Minister Jan O'Sullivan subsequently appointed Michael Kelly, former chair of the Higher Education Authority, to get the merger plan back on track.

Officers from the WIT branch of the Teachers Union of Ireland met with Mr Kelly in early December and told him they did not want to be forced into any merger.

At the meeting, union representatives complained that the goal posts for university designation kept changing over the years and said its members did not want to be 'fobbed off' with anything other than a university of the south east based in Waterford and not merged with IT Carlow.

However Mr Kelly is understood to have told the TUI that WIT being allowed to 'stand alone' was not envisaged by the Department of Education.