

Taoiseach Calls for Progress on Waterford/Carlow TU Bid

TUSE application due in second half of this year

Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and IT Carlow (ITC) have been urged by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar to advance their merger process if they wish to achieve a Technological University of the South East (TUSE).

Mr Varadkar made the call at the Project Ireland 2040 showcase held at the WIT Arena on Friday last, less than 24 hours after the TU Bill had been passed by the Seanad, requiring only the President's signature for activation.

"Technological Universities, by their very nature, bring students in from outside of the region," said the Taoiseach.

"They allow more students who may want to, to stay in the region, (that is) to study if they're from the region. They create all sorts of spin-off businesses and they're also very important in attracting investment into the region. And I really think it's one of the reasons why the South East has lagged behind the other regions, is because of the absence of a Technological University. That's something that I really want to see happen during my term as Taoiseach is that a Technological University is established here in the South East."



WIT President Willie Donnelly chatting on Friday last with Minister of State at the Department of Education with special responsibility for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor TD and Carlow IT President, Dr Patricia Mulcahy. | Photos: Noel Browne

Mr Varadkar admitted he is disappointed that, in all likelihood, the Waterford/Carlow alliance will not be the first of the potential TU franchisees to benefit from such an academic upgrade.

The Taoiseach referred to the strides made by the DIT/IT Tallaght/IT Blanchardstown (TU4Dublin) bid for TU status, adding that "they are in fact ready to go" when it comes to their final TU application submission, which may well be granted as early as this September.

"I think it's really sad, in fact it's actually a tragedy that in my constituency in West Dublin, even though I'm delighted it's going ahead in my constituency, that there may well be a university campus there, perhaps this year, and yet we don't have it here (in Waterford). We didn't even have an RTC (in Dublin West) in the 1990s and now we're going to have a university campus and really, in my view, the South East should have been first (to achieve such a status). But for that to happen, Waterford IT and Carlow IT really need to get together and resolve any issues that are outstanding because the next (TU) has to be in the South East and it would be a real shame if the next one is Cork or Kerry, or the one after that is the Midlands or the West, because no region will benefit more from having a Technological University than this one, and I would really encourage everyone who is involved in that, in WIT and Carlow IT, to really get on with it over the next couple of months and to come together and make that reality, that we can have a TU here in the South East, as soon as possible, and the Government is going to be 100 per cent behind you in those efforts."

Just an hour before the Taoiseach arrived at Carriganore on Friday last, the Steering Group for the TUSE bid revealed that it "will have all preparatory work completed by July 2018 for an application in the second half of 2018. Further to the recent mapping of data sets of both institutes we will meet the national criteria".

Speaking to The Munster Express in the wake of the Taoiseach's comments, WIT President, Professor Willie Donnelly, said

while he understood where Mr Varadkar was coming from, he stated: “This is our decision. It’s our gig, if you like.”

Prof Donnelly continued: “We have been committed to a Technological University from day one. We’re working towards that. The relationship between ourselves and Carlow is one in which we are working together to deliver a Technological University because that’s what the South East needs, and everybody knows that. And what I was making clear today is that nobody else speaks for Waterford Institute of Technology. We speak for ourselves. People have put things in the paper, different perspectives which they are entitled to, but from my perspective as President, and for my team, we are committed to delivering a University for the South East because if we don’t, the people of the South East won’t forgive us. Industry is asking for it too. This is about the future, and jobs and having the type of educational system that a Technological University can deliver.”

See Page 4 of this week’s Munster Express Newspaper for full text of this story