



## **Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**

**June 21<sup>st</sup> 2023**

### **Session 1**

A Chairde,

I come before you this evening to introduce draft Order - the Technological Universities Act 2018 (Section 44f) (Appointed Day) Order 2023 - to the Committee.

This draft Order provides that the higher education institution know currently as St. Angela's College, Sligo shall on 1 November become part of the Atlantic Technological University, or ATU as it is commonly referred to.

The order must be approved by resolution of each House of the Oireachtas and I wish to thank you for this opportunity to discuss the matter today in Committee.

In announcing its establishment a little over a year ago now I referenced ATU as a new powerhouse in the region and I meant

that sincerely. This can be seen in not only the regional impacts of the new TU but also in the cross-border All Island context with exciting collaborative developments being pursued by the TU with Ulster University for instance and in the context of the work of the North West Tertiary Education Cluster.

The further expansion of such a powerhouse will further the reach and impact of the TU in the region when it gains disciplines provided by the foremost initial teaching education facility for home economics in the country along with that institution's proven excellence in other fields such as nursing and health sciences - aligning with the TU's current nursing programmes in Castlebar and Letterkenny– to name but two.

The proposed incorporation would see ATU become the second largest of the 5 established TUs behind TU Dublin and amongst the top three or four largest HEIs in the country overall.

The TU is spread across eight, rising to 9 following incorporation, multi-campuses spanning four counties and offering over 600 programmes at all levels on the National Framework of Qualifications with a focus on practice-based study and research.

The incorporation in view has been the result of years of hard work and dedicated effort by the management, students and staff and indeed the wider stakeholder in enterprise, business and community spheres in the West and North West. It is something that I can honestly say is universally awaited and welcomed by all parties.

I must pay tribute also to the Ursuline Order who have generously gifted the Lough Gill campus and additional lands to the new TU upon incorporation. In return there will be a legacy recognition of the dedicated service to higher education that the Order has provided in Sligo for over seventy years.

This is the first incorporation application process under new legislative provisions and as the first such application I was advised by a panel of experts established by the Higher Education Authority which reported very positively to me on the application. The panel recommended, and I agreed, that any incorporation should be underpinned by a legal agreement setting out the transfer of assets and liabilities between the parties upon incorporation and to which all parties, including the Ursulines and my Department would accept.

I made this a requirement of my decision of approval and the agreement has been duly made and signed off by the parties. I

transmitted my final decision of approval to the Chairs of the applicant HEIs on 13 June.

The staff of the college are protected as their terms and conditions will be safeguarded along with their pension rights.

As such I see only positives in this proposed incorporation and wholeheartedly commend the draft order to the Committee for approval.

I would like to thank all concerned with this incorporation - the Presidents, governing bodies, staff and students of St. Angeal's and of ATU, a wide variety of business, enterprise and community stakeholders in the West and North West, the international advisory panel, Higher Education Authority, Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland and the Department and OPC, all of whom played their roles, statutory and non-statutory, in getting the matter to this point.

I wish also to thank you, Deputies and Senators, for your kind attention today and to thank all West and North West members across the Oireachtas for their steadfast support for this highly significant higher education project.

I sincerely hope the Committee will commend this draft Order.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir