

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS, BREISOIDEACHAS AGUS ÁRDOIDEACHAS, TAIGHDE, NUÁLAÍOCHT AGUS EOLAÍOCHT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

Dé Máirt, 17 Bealtaine 2022

Tuesday, 17 May 2022

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 11 a.m.

The Joint ~~Committee~~ met at 11 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Rose Conway-Walsh,	
Alan Farrell,	Pauline O'Reilly.
Jim O'Callaghan,	
Pádraig O'Sullivan,	
Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire.	

* In éagmais / In the absence of Senator Fiona O'Loughlin

Teachta / Deputy Paul Kehoe sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: Good morning everyone. Apologies have been received from Senators Flynn, Mullen and O’Loughlin. I remind members to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off for the duration of the meeting as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment, even when on silent mode. Regarding the speaking slots for today’s meeting, I ask that Senator Byrne be allowed to go second as he has to leave early. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The draft minutes of the meeting of 10 May 2022 have been circulated. Are the minutes agreed? Agreed.

Future Funding of Higher Education: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: Today we are meeting the chairpersons of the technological universities, TUs. On behalf of the committee I welcome Ms Josephine Feehily, Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, TUS, Mr. Jimmy Deenihan, Munster Technological University, MTU, and Dr. Patrick Prendergast, South East Technological University, SETU. Ms Maura McAnally, SC, chair of Atlantic Technological University, ATU, sends her apologies. She cannot attend due to conflicting work commitments, which is unfortunate, but she will send a written submission to the committee in the coming weeks. That submission will be uploaded to the Oireachtas website.

I thank our three witnesses for turning up today because it is very important that this committee hears from them. They are here to discuss the future funding of higher education. Before we begin, it should be noted that the committee agreed in private session on 1 March to invite the TU chairpersons, appointed in the past six months or so, before us to discuss this issue. It was agreed that this would be very valuable and a great opportunity to meet them as they embark on their new roles. Each of them corresponded with the committee prior to their appointment and it is nice to meet them in person today.

I ask members to note that the role of the chair is different from the role of the president of a TU under the provisions of the Technological Universities Act 2018. Under Schedule 2, section 14 (1) the president of a technological university “shall carry on and manage, and control generally, the academic, administrative, and financial activities of the technological university, and matters relating to its staff and perform such other functions (if any) as may be determined by, the technological university, and for those purposes shall have such powers as are necessary or expedient.”. Section 9 outlines the role of the governing body of a technological university while section 12(1)(b) provides for the appointment of a chairperson who shall be “an external member, appointed by the governing body”. The chairperson is responsible for leadership of the governing body and for ensuring its effectiveness in all aspects of its role. It is the chairperson’s responsibility to ensure the governing body meets the objectives and complies with the requirements set out in the code of governance of each TU. With this in mind, I ask members to ensure that their questions stay within the remit of the chairpersons. The representative body for the presidents appeared before the committee previously.

The code of governance also sets out the specific responsibilities of the chairperson of the governing body. In addition to having responsibility for leadership of the board and ensuring its effectiveness in all aspects of its functions, the chairperson is also responsible for the effec-

tive management of the governing body's agenda, promoting a culture of openness and debate by facilitating the effective contribution of key management and all governing body members, ensuring the governing body receives accurate, timely and clear information, advising the Minister of the skills and competency requirements of the governing body in advance of governing body vacancies arising, and ensuring the governing body meets its annual reporting requirements.

The format of the meeting is as follows: I will invite Ms Feehily to make a brief opening statement, followed by Mr. Deenihan and Dr. Prendergast. This will be followed by questions from the committee. Each member has an eight-minute slot, including time for witnesses to respond. The committee will publish the opening statements on its web page following the meeting.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Dr. Prendergast has asked to go second.

Chairman: That is fine.

I remind members and witnesses of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of a person or entity. If their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed by the Chair to discontinue their remarks and it is imperative that they comply with such a direction.

I call Ms Feehily.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I thank the Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to be here this morning for a broad-ranging discussion with them. As the committee knows, the technological university sector is very new, albeit that it builds on a very strong and valuable tradition of technical and technological education in Ireland. The chairs of the governing bodies that members see before them are also very new. Our institutions are only coming into being and while our perspectives and state of knowledge of the sector that we have joined and of the universities whose governing bodies we chair vary, it is fair to say we are at an early stage of development. That said, we will give the committee as much insight as we can from the perspective of governing bodies. We know members have previously had executive perspectives from presidents and other senior team members. We considered it might be helpful to the committee to minimise overlap, at least in our opening remarks, and to give some breadth to the discussion. Therefore, my colleagues and I will focus on different aspects of the committee's agenda.

I want to talk about the future. The joint committee's invitation referenced the future in a number of agenda items. The future of the technological university sector is bright and exciting. It is a future with incredible potential. Realising that potential is essential if the vision and intention of policymakers and legislators are to be accomplished, not just for higher education but including the vision, policies and outcomes for social and economic development in Ireland and for the competitiveness of this country. It is also essential if the expectations of the communities we serve are to be met. I include in that a very broad and diverse range of communities: students; potential students and their families; lifelong learners; work-based learners; disadvantaged communities; the business community; and others. In becoming technological universities, TUs, we have made commitments to those communities to be responsive and agile.

A technological university is different. It is not just an institute of technology writ large with a fancy new nameplate, although it does, of course, bring with it the values, traditions and commitment to community of those institutes. A technological university's academic standing is different from an institute of technology, IoT, and that has to be nourished and sustained. Its legislative underpinnings and governance are different and are about to change again if the Oireachtas passes the Higher Education Authority Bill 2022, which is currently before the Houses. In practical terms, the size and scale of the management and administrative challenge is very different, with multiple campuses that cross county and regional boundaries.

To take that step up and to achieve its potential, including the vision a technological university sets for itself, its staff and its students, requires a depth and breadth of change way beyond branding. A technological university needs to build the capacity to effect that change speedily and dynamically while still doing the day job very well - teaching, researching, developing programmes and delivering. That capacity building needs resources is self-evident and funding will be discussed further by my colleague, Mr. Deenihan, but there is more to capacity than funding. My remarks on capacity are about the application of funding and the focus of effort.

I understand a soon-to-be-published OECD report will propose an approach to an employment contract and career path for academic staff. It is also expected to address organisation structures. We look forward to receiving it. It will be an important contribution to capacity building. The Minister, Deputy Harris, spoke recently about reducing the ratio of students to academic staff and that will be important.

Making the essential contribution to national competitiveness which we consider is possible, including to apprenticeships and research, also needs capacity in the form of people, space and facilities including digitisation.

Sometimes with the best will in the world we approach change as if it will just happen because we say so, but it will not. Change that will stick is hard work. It requires a dedicated focus, commitment, persistence, energy and resources. It needs human resource capacity and investment in the softer, less visible aspects of an organisation. In any sector, in addition to added value and growth, a merger brings new experiences and new challenges. What kind of management and governance structures are appropriate for a dispersed organisation? What are the risks? How can we keep tradition while avoiding silos? How can we ensure that the TU is more than the sum of its parts? How can we build confidence across the whole organisation and define and create a new culture, in my case a TUS culture?

From the perspective of the governing body, these are questions that need to be kept on the table in our oversight and governance role alongside steering and overseeing the delivery of our statutory mandate. Over the next six to 12 months or so, each technological university will be preparing a strategic plan for the years ahead which will require capacity in all its dimensions to be addressed to drive the implementation of those strategies and Government policies.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: I thank the Cathaoirleach and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I am doing so as chairperson of the governing body noting that my role is to speak for it, and it is the role of the president, Professor Veronica Campbell, to speak on behalf of the university.

South East Technological University, SETU, is the first university created in the south-east of Ireland. It was established on 1 May this year. We held a celebration for staff and students, which was attended by the Minister, Deputy Harris, and many of our public representatives,

including the committee Chairman, Deputy Kehoe, and Senator Malcolm Byrne. It was called a momentous day, a groundbreaking day, and an historic day for the south east. SETU must be a success. Failure to deliver for the south east in a timely manner, when the expectations are so high, is not an option.

All universities have a mission in education and research. Education and research must be developed together in parallel, as both leverage their success off each other. To do this in SETU we will: scale up the quality of our courses and increase the number of programmes co-created with regional partners and industry, incorporating novel admissions pathways; and deepen our impact on regional society and the economy through increased high-quality research, innovation and entrepreneurship activity. At the moment, 30% of SETU courses are co-created with partners. In traditional universities, almost no courses are co-created with partners in this way. This is a massive differentiator for the technological universities.

Regarding research and innovation, there are 26,000 businesses in the south east. For many of them SETU will be their anchor institution. SETU will create opportunities for them to innovate new products and services and to grow. How will we do this? An important starting point for us is the south-east regional enterprise action plan. It sets out a role for the technological universities as key enablers of regional economic development through clustering and building economic critical mass in key industries. The plan states “there will be an opportunity for clusters to inform research and education priorities in the TU and for the TU ... to guide the future development of the cluster, inform on future skills needs, and identify a range of industry development opportunities”. There will be linkages between the technological university and regional industry, quite unlike what exists in traditional universities.

In the case of SETU, the specialisms are: advanced manufacturing; financial services; ICT; pharmaceuticals; and sustainable agriculture. Some 95% of the enterprise base in the south-east is comprised of small and medium-sized enterprise, SMEs. They have limited research and innovation capacity. SETU is expected to perform a lead role, along with local enterprise offices, LEOs, and other agencies, in supporting these 26,000 SMEs in particular.

Physical proximity is important for innovation. I make this point because SETU has campuses distributed throughout the south east, giving it the perfect platform to support innovation. SETU currently supports 65 companies in incubation and innovation centres in Waterford, Kilkenny and Carlow. There are also many incubators in regional towns in the south east, including the Hatch Lab in Gorey and the one in Enniscorthy. It is our aim to link in with these.

SETU is proud to have four technology gateways, namely, design+, in applied design; SEAM, in advanced manufacturing; PMBRC, in pharmaceutical and healthcare; and the Walton institute, in mobile services. These technology gateways must continue to be funded. They have been the primary vehicles for industry-academia collaboration in support of enterprise development. Each gateway is underpinned by a strong research base. In order to make them credible and sustainable in respect of knowledge generation, there needs to be funding in support of capacity building and enhancement within research centres in order for the gateways to function. There also needs to be a programme of capital investment in buildings to promote research and innovation. In SETU, the technology gateways and research centres will be used to advance a comprehensive engagement strategy across research, education and innovation. We will also support research that leads to entrepreneurial ventures because student entrepreneurship is about not just teaching our students to get jobs but also teaching them how to create jobs.

For staff, contracts and workload models that support research and the creation of entrepre-

neurial ventures will be important. TUs must be innovators in this domain. This would make a significant contribution to driving forward regional innovation ecosystems.

As for research and innovation, what is needed is funding to support capacity building and enhanced infrastructure to international standards that will in turn enhance the capability of TUs to attract and to retain international talent and make a significant impact. Specifically, we suggest it would be appropriate to create a TU-only fund in support of research capacity building and capital investment. Let us call it a programme for investment in technological universities.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: I thank the Chair and members of the committee for the invitation to attend this round-table discussion on the future funding of higher education. I am here in my capacity as chairperson of the governing body of Munster Technological University. In the past I have been in this committee room in different capacities, as both a Minister and a member of various committees. It is a privilege to be here today in this capacity. The members are privileged to be here as well, as I am sure they fully realise. As chair, I do not have an executive or operational role in the day-to-day management of the university. That is a matter for the president, Professor Maggie Cusack, and her staff. I am, however, responsible for leadership of MTU's governing body and for ensuring its effectiveness in discharging its oversight role and statutory functions under the Technological Universities Act 2018. I was happy to take up the role of chair in 2021, especially given my support for the development of the technological university sector during my time as a public representative. I was a member of the Cabinet as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the Bill for the establishment of the TUs was brought before the Cabinet by the then Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn. I was a strong advocate of that legislation, and it is immensely satisfying to have seen it come to fruition and to appear here today along with my fellow chairs.

MTU has 14,066 whole-time equivalent students and a staff of 1,676 whole-time equivalents. We operate from six campuses across Cork and Kerry, including campuses in Bishopstown, Cork; Tralee; Cork School of Music; Crawford College of Art and Design; and the National Maritime College of Ireland, Ringaskiddy.

MTU was delighted to host a recent meeting of the committee at our Bishopstown campus and we look forward to further constructive engagements and to welcoming the committee to visit other parts of the university in the future. I am sure that the committee found that visit very useful and very informative.

The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2022 placed MTU as both the highest ranked of Ireland's TUs and winner of a special award, university of the year for Covid impact. These are proud distinctions and fitting testaments to the hard work of all our staff, students, governors and other stakeholders in realising the merger between Cork Institute of Technology, CIT, and IT Tralee, and rising to meet the various challenges faced during our foundational period.

MTU is currently undertaking significant pieces of work as part of our strategic development, transformation and change management, including developing our first strategic plan, designing new executive structures, and an operating model for the future of our professional services.

Turning to the matters the committee is keen to address today, I wish to make the following submissions, with a particular focus on the funding dimension to them.

MTU welcomes the recent acknowledgement by the Government, in its Funding the Future

policy, of the core funding gap of €307 million in higher education. There are three issues, from MTU's perspective, with the future funding model. First, very importantly, the 60:40 funding split between traditional universities and TUs is arbitrary and not justifiable, especially given that the actual breakdown of respective students is closer to 50:50. This perpetuates a two-tier system which is not in the best interests of students, staff or, indeed, the Irish taxpayer who funds it. Having been established, TUs now need to be empowered through appropriate funding to deliver on our goals. The budget allocations of TUs are set and static, meaning that an increase in student numbers reduces the funded income available per student. This is a disincentive to growth and the polar opposite of what is required. This can be contrasted with traditional universities, which are funded per student and thereby incentivised to grow. A new and fit-for-purpose funding model is required, and consideration should be given to multi-annual funding as part of that. Funding per postgraduate student, including PhD students, is also lower for TUs than for traditional universities, placing the TU sector and our students at a significant disadvantage in this area. The TU legislation has growth targets in respect of postgraduate output and the funding model should not inhibit those targets.

Linked to the issue of funding is the ability of TUs to borrow money. Again, having been established, TUs now need to be empowered. There is a mechanism for TUs to borrow under the legislation but it is dependent on an enabling framework from the Higher Education Authority, HEA. This framework has not yet been introduced, placing TUs at another disadvantage to traditional universities, which can access financial markets and obtain funding at another level entirely. Such funding is crucial to capital development in particular, along with Government measures to make the cost of construction more affordable, and essential if TUs are to be part of the solution to the student accommodation crisis this country is facing. This crisis will only worsen in coming years with the influx of refugees due to the invasion of Ukraine, for example.

As for expansion, MTU must increase its capacity significantly to meet current and future demographics. A major issue for us is a lack of buildings and services, as distinct from lack of equipment. We anticipate student growth at a rate of 35% over the next decade. Based on a norm of 10 sq. m per student, MTU requires a further 60,000 sq. m of space to meet demand. We have excellent projects at various stages of design and development for new buildings and refurbishments, which will address issues of sustainability and housing. TUs can lead the way on these Government priorities if given the mandate, power and funding to do so.

With reference to apprenticeships, MTU is the largest provider of craft apprenticeships in the State and we have seen significant growth in numbers over recent years. Further increases will require increased capacity, as previously mentioned. As part of our solutions to this rising demand, MTU aims to deliver learning environments that combine hands-on education with virtual and augmented reality technology. In doing so, we will enhance our flexibility and future-proof delivery.

MTU is passionate about equality, diversity and inclusion, EDI, digital learning and student grant support and puts a lot of resources into them. There is a growing appreciation of the importance of access and EDI across the higher education sector and wider Irish society. They should be further incorporated as part of our mainstream activities and well funded to maximise success. MTU is keen, in particular, to encourage more female participation in the areas of apprenticeship and science, technology, engineering and mathematics, STEM. Knowledge of digital learning has advanced, and providing TUs with support to maximise the benefits of digital delivery will reap rewards by increasing access, retention and success. Such supports, combined with appropriate and sustainable student grants, will make higher education more

accessible to all.

On the subjects of life-long learning, progression pathways and continuing professional development, CPD, MTU is committed to ensuring that all those who wish to develop themselves are welcomed. In order to strengthen offerings in this regard, TUs require mainstream funding and support.

MTU excels in research, innovation and engagement. These activities will continue to grow with the introduction of a new academic contract that includes research. Research and innovation funding should rise to match traditional universities. The further funding of schemes to accelerate the growth of research and innovation, such as the continuation of TU transformation funding, will also help reap rewards in this area.

Staff and student mental health and well-being supports are paramount considerations, especially in light of the pandemic. It is crucial, therefore, that all TUs have sufficient funding to offer appropriate supports and encourage well-being, rather than merely dealing with crises which has been the historical experience to a large extent. MTU is keen to develop its offerings in this regard and in doing will strive to achieve healthy university status.

Again, I thank the committee for the invitation to attend and look forward to answering questions from members.

Chairman: Thank you very much. This committee visited TUS and MTU and met the presidents and staff there, which was very useful for us. We will be visiting SETU in September, which will give Dr. Prendergast the opportunity to be in first. The first member is Deputy Conway-Walsh, who will be followed by Senator Malcolm Byrne.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Go raibh maith agat Cathaoirleach. I welcome our guests. This is a really good opportunity to discuss what we need to discuss here. Written across all three opening statements is the vision that the chairpersons have for the opportunities presented and the collective responsibility on us all to make sure that those visions and opportunities are maximised. We are on the right road but we will have a deeper dig now into how we might do that. How concerned are the chairpersons by the fact that the future funding announcement made no mention of reforming the funding model or addressing the two-tier funding system in higher education? The 60-40 split will still remain, rather than a 50-50 split.

Mr. Deenihan talked about how traditional universities are incentivised to increase places and then they get more funding per student. It is my understanding that all institutes of higher education are allocated a share of the overall funding envelope based on the number of students enrolled so the more students they have, the larger their share. However, more students in the system overall means less funding per student, in the way that it is done. I would like to give Mr. Deenihan an opportunity to expand on that because it is a matter of concern. There was an announcement recently that there will be more places provided again this year and while that is fine, if it is not underpinned with adequate resources per student then we are not setting ourselves up for success. I ask Mr. Deenihan to elaborate on his point and to explain how the system works differently for the TUs as compared with the traditional universities. I have a few more questions but I ask Mr. Deenihan to address that first.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: This is a major concern. I can see the impact already, even as we start this process. I would hope that in its report this committee will make a very strong recommendation as regards funding and parity of funding. A 50-50 split is important because the

same number of students attend TUs as attend the traditional universities-----

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Was Mr. Deenihan expecting to see that addressed in the future of funding paper?

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Yes, but I suppose it is out there for discussion. I have experience of preparing Oireachtas committee reports and will give a brief example. I prepared a report on women in sport back in 2004. It was noticed by the then Minister, former Deputy John O'Donoghue and he ring-fenced money for women in sport. I have looked online at the work this committee has done and would like to compliment the members on how thorough they have been. The work is as thorough as that of any committee that has explored an issue in this House. A strong recommendation from this committee is so important. If the TUs are to achieve their ambition, which we all understand and agree with, then they have to be funded properly. Dr. Prendergast, who comes from the traditional university sector, really understands that as well. It is a big issue and as chairperson of the MTU I am very conscious of it. I have passed on my views to the Minister. Previously, I was not aware that there was such a difference in the funding of traditional universities and institutes of technology. Basically, the Government is carrying the same formula forward for the TUs as was in existence for the ITs. While I am in the position of chairperson, I will be stressing the importance of this issue to the Minister and the Taoiseach. I totally agree with Deputy Conway-Walsh that this is a big issue.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: We hear what Mr. Deenihan is saying. I will move on to the next question, which is related. I will direct this one to Dr. Prendergast. I share his ambition for the TUs and agree that we need to think about the investment we need to make to produce the world-class institutes they have the potential to be. Developing the research capabilities in the technological sector is key, as Dr. Prendergast said. Horizon is a €100 billion fund to support research and is a good proxy for research performance in institutes. It is also a vitally important source of funding for the institutes of higher education. Since 2014, Ireland has drawn down more than €1 billion worth of research funding. A full €680 million of this was drawn down by third level institutes and the rest by private companies. However, less than 10% - €53.7 million - went to the institutes of technology and the TUs. To highlight the issue further, the institutes of technology that make up the ATU have only won €1.9 million since 2014 or just under 0.2% of Ireland's total. I believe we can catch up and bridge the gap, but not without doing something very different to what we are doing now.

Dr. Prendergast outlined in his statement some of what needs to be done to address this disparity in research capacity but does he see the future funding announcement as sufficient to achieve that? I am very conscious of the resources that are needed in order to be able to access and draw down that funding in the first instance. What do the TUs need?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: We need two things. First, we need the constraints to be taken off the TU sector. The Deputy might not know this but the contracts that academic staff can be offered and their remuneration within TUs is very much less than in traditional universities. We in the TUs need to have those constraints taken off to allow us to compete in the market for top class academics who can compete for this European funding and, indeed, to incentivise academics already employed in the TU sector to compete for it too. The Deputy is right; there is plenty of money on the table for research Europe-wide and the TU sector wants to play a greater role in successfully getting this money into Ireland. Different kinds of academic contracts are needed and a little more flexibility in how we manage those contracts is also needed. We also need the State to make a significant investment in the TUs, including capital investment to upgrade the buildings because we cannot do top-quality European research in much of the current

infrastructure that we have, certainly in SETU. We also need capacity building through hiring staff to compete for those research funds. We will get every euro of investment in that kind of infrastructure - capital investment and people - back many times over in successfully competing for European research funds. As the Deputy said, significant amounts of money are out there but we need to incentivise people, and have the resources and infrastructure, to go with successfully competing for that funding.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: How quickly do the TUs need that?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: It should have been done before now. Horizon Europe is already up and running. There will be a successor fund so whatever investments we make now we will be competing for successor funds in the future. We should not let a year go by before we have some sort of programme for investment in technological universities.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I thank our witnesses. I congratulate them on their relatively new appointments. It is appropriate, given these are three relatively new institutions, to acknowledge the work of their new presidents, in addition to the management, governing bodies and everyone who has got the institutions to where they are today.

Deputy Conway-Walsh touched on many of the issues around the discrepancies in funding between what might be called the traditional sector and the new sector. I certainly agree the committee's recommendations that come from this process should address that. Every institution should be treated in an equitable way. I will talk about the broader funding priorities question, namely, the major issue of higher education and funding. Some of the witnesses have this experience, but if they were in the Minister's shoes and decisions had to be made now, where would they allocate the priority funding? Is it around addressing core funding? Is it around reform of the Student Universal Support Ireland, SUSI, grant scheme? Is it around cutting the student contribution?

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: It is multifaceted and not just any one area in particular. Infrastructure should be one of the priorities, which Dr. Prendergast mentioned in respect of research. From my experience in Bishopstown, Cork, there is a building in that location dating from 1974 which is not fit for purpose. I am sure committee members were taken to see it when they visited. If we want to attract more students into TUs throughout the country, we have to have top-class facilities. It is all incremental. It does not happen overnight, but it has to start somewhere. There should be a major building schedule to bring the TUs up to the standard of the traditional universities. That is one issue.

There is also the issue of research mentioned by Dr. Prendergast. MTU has done quite well in research but could do better if it had the facilities. A research facility will be provided in Bishopstown shortly. The other issues are very important but, from my point of view, the issue of upgrading facilities and providing new ones is very important.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I will put the same question to Dr. Prendergast. I know he will say the top priority, and the Chair will agree with me, has to be the construction of the new Wexford campus. Apart from the funding investment required there, I ask him to look at the broader question of the system.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: I will take Wexford as an example. That is a capital project. I am sure the other TUs have similar capital projects and refurbishment projects in respect of infrastructure. If we want to build up research and innovation capacity, we have to have some

capital programme for refurbishment and development of new building infrastructure. That is a priority. The matter of equity is also important. Why should the State pay X for every student in the traditional university sector and a percentage of X less for a student in the TU sector? This is an equity issue and it is not right. It should be fixed. Capital and the equity issue are the two issues that are of particular importance.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: Dr. Prendergast will be aware a decision will be made around core funding, SUSI grants and so on. Has he a view on that issue? I will ask Ms Feehily the same question in a moment.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: I am happy to let Ms Feehily answer. On the core grant and how the total Vote for higher education is distributed, at present a division is made between universities and TUs that disadvantages the latter. That should be fixed, if we are to focus on one issue.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: Okay.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I was a civil servant too long to be comfortable commenting on policy. Whatever the funding decisions are, core funding is essential and it needs to be clearly additional. One of my concerns, and we had a webinar with the Department around the time of the announcement, is to make sure of that. Any day we get a Minister announcing €307 million is a good day and it has to be welcomed, but I want to know what it is for because if it is pre-empted and outside our control, that could be a problem. If it is pre-empted by pay increases, for example, that is no good to me. It is no good to the universities, if it already pre-empted. Right now, it is a little too opaque for me to have a sense of what the benefit will be. It is about core funding that is clearly additional and in the base. Those committee members who know the Book of Estimates know what that means. The funding needs to get into the base so that it is built on in subsequent years and is not ring-fenced.

Ring-fenced funding in the form of the TU transformation fund, which was mentioned by Mr. Deenihan, has been transformational. That programme is due to end and needs to be renewed for a further three years so there is targeted funding as well as core funding. To get back to the announcement, I was encouraged by the specific commitment in it to a strong developmental agenda for the TUs. That suggests there is at least an openness to positive discrimination, if I might put it like that, in favour of the TUs and recognising where we are coming from. That additionality piece is incredibly important from my point of view.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I will focus on the talk about cutting student fees. My view on this is known. If we are to increase access, we are far better investing in the SUSI grant scheme, widening access to grants and increasing the amounts available. The old institutes of technology, the TUs, have been particularly strong on the access agenda. I am conscious, in looking at the most recent data for the former Limerick and Athlone Institutes of Technology that, in both cases, 62% of students were in receipt of SUSI grants. A cut in fees will make no difference to those students. In fact, across the TU sector, the figure is in excess of 55%. It is not that dissimilar for the other former institutes of technology. Do the representatives care to express a view on the priorities the Minister should have in respect of increasing access?

Ms Josephine Feehily: Given our history of access, there are deep traditions in both our founding institutes to disadvantaged communities. I absolutely agree with the Senator. The access issue will not be enhanced by cutting the fees. The grant system is clearly of more relevance to our particular catchment areas. There is also a risk that cutting the fees, or the student contribution as it is known, might not give us additional funding because that will have to be

topped up. That is why I focused on additionality. If we are getting money out of pot A today, and it comes out of pot B tomorrow, it is no good if it is not extra. The SUSI grant system is certainly more relevant to the student body in TUS, no question.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: With the Chair's indulgence, I ask the other witnesses to respond to that question.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: Our governing body has not discussed this. The opinion the Senator is hearing is my personal opinion. He referenced the interesting statistic that 60% of the students in the technological universities he mentioned - it is probably similar in SETU - are not paying this €3,000 anyway because it is being paid for them. It is the 40% from families which end up paying this €3,000 who look to benefit if it is abolished. Is that the best way to spend our money? The SUSI grant that 60% of students get now is not sufficient to live on. It might be better to spend that money on improving the SUSI grant rather than abolishing the student contribution for everybody. That is where I would come down on it if I was expressing a personal opinion. But the governing body of SETU has not discussed it.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Our governing body has not discussed it. It has not come up. I will put it on the next agenda for sure.

Senator Malcolm Byrne: I have put Mr. Deenihan on the spot. It is more difficult for Ms Feehily.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: The present system is fairly equitable. It should be improved to some extent but it is a better system than introducing fees, for example. Then there is the maintenance aspect. It replaced the system in 1997. I was part of that decision. It is something that has to be considered very carefully. I believe a reduction of a €1,000 would be the equivalent of a shortfall of €80 million. If you took the €3,000 out then you would have to find €240 million somewhere. It depends on where that will come from. If it comes from capital or somewhere else, then no one wins. The solution is multifaceted. It means looking at different parts of the equation and seeing where the resources require concentration. There could be certain areas where you could save money.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I want to commend and thank all three guests for taking on the position of chair of their governing bodies. It is difficult in this country to get suitably qualified people to take on roles on State boards. A lot of people do not want to do it. You end up being exposed to Oireachtas committees or public scrutiny. It is very important for the technological universities that the people who take on the role of chair come with the background that those here do. An entity such as a technological university will be judged to a large extent by the people at the top in the first instance so I commend them on taking on the role.

Ms Feehily spoke about capacity and the importance of increasing capacity. Is she talking about the range of courses available, the buildings, the numbers of students? How does she define capacity?

Ms Josephine Feehily: I am talking first about institutional capacity. It includes, for example, the employment contract which Dr. Prendergast mentioned. If you start at a different place to other institutes of higher education in terms of careers and so on that is a big capacity issue. Research is done by competent qualified people. The employment arrangements militate against us. That is one capacity issue. There is an OECD report pending and I look forward to seeing it.

Another capacity issue relates to the physical set-up. The TUs are clearly very keen to play their part in apprenticeships, for example. That requires physical space, kit and equipment and we do not have enough of that in order to grow the apprenticeship programmes. Therefore there is physical capacity and then employment capacity but there is also the kind of institutional capacity. Governance needs attention. The legislative framework is changing and then there is the existing structures. It is a real step up and challenge for the executive teams to manage across regions. It is just different. You cannot see everything. New structures are needed in order to make sure that the strategy can flow down and that the learnings can flow up in terms of the way the organisation works. The OECD report is supposed to discuss the need for more support structures within the institutions. The support structures are fairly weak. It is very much about building up institutional capacity over time.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: In his opening remarks Dr. Prendergast said that 30% of courses in SETU are co-created with partners. Does that have any funding implications? Do the partners bring money to the table? What role do they play?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: It is a good question. If the president of SETU was here she might answer it better.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: But does Dr. Prendergast think there is a benefit?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: I think so. I came from Trinity College and we prided ourselves on developing courses where the academics developed the courses and very good ones. It was a surprise to me finding out how much sitting down with employers and having a dialogue about what an employer wants in the curriculum and co-designing with the employer or other partners such as professional bodies was going on in SETU and the other TUs. Moreover, I think it is a good thing. It means that the courses are more relevant to employers and therefore the graduates are more job-ready to fit in to the industry in the region. I spoke to some people in SETU yesterday in preparation for this meeting who said that it could even be more than 30% now.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: How do you develop those co-partnerships?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: If you were doing a course in, say financial services, you contact all the industry nearby and sit around the table and you say “what kind of curriculum would you like us develop?”. The academics have a dialogue with human resources or the technical people in the industry and you co-design a curriculum. I think it is great, frankly, and we will see more of it.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: We saw a fine example of that on our trip at Bishopstown, it might have been in the old building that Mr. Deenihan referred to, where there were young people being trained on how to manufacture medical devices for companies in the vicinity in Cork. Would Mr. Deenihan agree?

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: They have really developed this connection with industry in Cork and Kerry. One of the reasons the pharma industry is doing so well in Cork is because of the connection with Bishopstown over the years. In Tralee, for example, a whole technology park was developed because the institute was collaborating. That is producing 400 jobs. They customise courses there in consultation with JRI, for example. They ask the employer what they want and then shape the course to suit them. That will be rolled out all over the country now. Dr. Prendergast mentioned the academic-down approach but this is really from the bottom up in every sense. It is a very good model and I think it will work very well in TUs. It is part of

their *raison d'être*, I suppose.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: And the student will know when they start a course that there is a good chance of jobs being available if they complete it.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Very much so.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Mr. Deenihan mentioned borrowing. I am conscious that TUs are not in a position to borrow. Are there potential downsides to this or is it another example of the inequality between TUs and traditional universities?

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Having been involved in projects for years, I see the importance of borrowing and having that capacity. I think the seven traditional universities have borrowed up to €1 billion. That gives them a great advantage of the TUs, which cannot borrow at all. If we could borrow tomorrow morning, I can see the student accommodation problem solved or at least certainly on the north campus at Tralee and in Bishopstown. It is really important. It is in the Bill but it has not been enacted as such yet. The HEA has to do that. It is critical. If that was a recommendation coming out of here it would be very important.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Does Ms Feehily agree that would be transformative?

Ms Josephine Feehily: I certainly agree that borrowing as a signal of parity of esteem, even if we never took it up, is incredibly important. Transparency around funding models and all of that is also important. I understand the reticence of the Higher Education Authority, HEA, but it is certainly now time to move on. The HEA needs a governance framework. I get that. We would be very happy to engage with a governance framework around borrowing and consider how it might be used. As a signal of intent and parity, to commence access to borrowing would be well received across the sector.

I will go back for a moment to the Deputy's previous question. I will develop Mr. Deenihan's point. The bottom-up piece is visible in the Technical University of the Shannon, TUS, in terms of industry. It comes out of having very open networks with business. The businesses in the regions know that if they knock on the door, courses will be developed. It is not a matter of institute-out programmes. It also links in well to access. The Deputy made the point that students know there might be jobs in an area but those partnerships can then enrich the access programmes by providing, in addition, an opportunity for sponsorship for access students.

The Deputy also asked about money from businesses. Sometimes that contribution can be in the form of expertise or through the contribution of equipment or guest lecturers. That is very valuable.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I thank our guests for being here for this useful engagement. I previously had the opportunity to engage with at least two of our guests when they wore different hats. I congratulate them on their recent appointments.

I missed the committee visit to the Bishopstown campus because I had Covid-19 at the time. I have since had the opportunity to visit. The questions I intended to ask were the key points that were raised with me on that occasion, particularly the 60:40 funding split. Perhaps there is not much point in dwelling on that any further. The position does seem iniquitous. In addition to that, it provides a perverse incentive, in that money is being spread more and more thinly and no real incentives for the technological universities are being created. Even though the technological universities are doing their best to expand their numbers, the incentives are not great

because the result is a situation where Peter is being robbed to pay Paul.

My first question is directed to any of our guests because I imagine that all the technological universities have a significant thumbprint in terms of apprenticeships. There are two parts to the question. I know the apprenticeship programme is a significant element of Munster Technological University, MTU. An important part of what we are going to be doing in the further and higher education sector in the coming years is transforming how we think of apprenticeships. The concept of the long ladder of opportunity, the MTU phrase, is important. One of the things we need to address is the distinction that is sometimes falsely created between the academic and apprenticeship programmes. There is nothing to say that apprenticeships cannot be part of a sequence that involves academic training and qualifications. The German model is often instanced as the best approach in that regard and I think the technological universities are well placed to integrate the academic and apprenticeship programmes. That includes traditional apprenticeships and new apprenticeships. How do we do that? What are the next steps that technological universities need to take to ensure we do that?

Many of those apprenticeships find it very hard to find adequate instructors, teachers and people to provide the courses. The same is true in academia. They are competing with industry and the rates that are paid in industry are much higher than what a technological university would be in a position to pay. That leads to difficulties with recruitment and retention. Those are my first questions.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: I thank Deputy Ó Laoghaire. I am glad he raised that point because as he knows, MTU is the largest provider of apprenticeships in the country. There are more than 1,800 apprentices. I visited the south campus in Tralee recently and saw how it has developed. Doing an apprenticeship no longer includes just the technical aspect. It also includes the business and safety aspects. Apprenticeships are changing. I agree with the Deputy when he said apprenticeships are about more than just using one's hands. One must also use one's head, in several different ways. That change is happening. There are now ways for an apprentice to go on and undertake a PhD. One can get a degree and a master's degree. I know of one instance of an apprentice doing a PhD. Things are changing.

The Deputy referred to the German model, which has been talked about in the Oireachtas for years. We are now moving towards it to some extent. Mr. Tim Horgan, who is the head of the faculty of engineering, addressed the committee on this issue some time ago. I was reading the notes of that meeting online. He gave a good overview of what is happening in MTU. Collaboration between MTU and the new technological universities is important. The approach that is being taken in MTU could help in the other technological universities. It is a successful approach.

We have a building crisis in this country, as we all know. There is a major shortage of plasterers, plumbers and electricians. It is very worrying, as we all know, to get someone to do a simple job. An electrician is very difficult to get and that is the case across the country. The technological universities will have a big role to play at that level in the future. That will be the case when we consider retrofitting and issues around climate change. All of that aspect of matters ties into apprenticeships. If we are to be competitive as a society, apprenticeships are going to be important. I thank the Deputy for raising that question.

I intend to invite all the Cork Deputies to Bishopstown, perhaps when the Dáil has adjourned. It is important to bring all the Deputies in to see what is happening in MTU. I will do the same in Kerry. I thank the Deputy.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Before I allow our other guests to respond, I might ask Ms Feehily to address an issue she raised in her opening statement, that is, the issue of borrowing funding and the mechanism in that regard. She might speak to that issue when she is answering the other question. Have we any sense of a timeline from the Department as to when these issues-----

Ms Josephine Feehily: We have not. I understand the president has been pursuing the issue at a sectoral level with the Department. When I asked him most recently, he did not have a sense of when that might happen. Does the Deputy want me to respond to his question about apprenticeships?

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Please do.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I endorse everything Mr. Deenihan said about the apprenticeship piece. We are keen to move forward in that regard. We have a backlog. As far as I understand it, all of the technological universities and institutes of technology have serious backlogs. Some of that was created by Covid-19 and the associated space issues. I suspect we are going to run summer programmes this year, or that is being discussed, in order to make some inroads into that backlog. We could do more if we had some space. It is as simple as that. We are happy to do it.

The new national apprenticeship board is going to be important in terms of how it reorganises the traditional craft apprenticeships. We will certainly step up to whatever innovation comes from that consideration. We in TUS, as is the case in MTU, are putting on programmes to encourage apprentices to move above the traditional levels. Normally they are awarded up to about level 6. We are encouraging them to move up to levels 7, 8 and 9. There should not be any constraint on them. I asked the president about it recently and he said that I, as a woman, have experienced a glass ceiling whereas in the craft industries, the ceiling is made of concrete. There is no culture or tradition of moving up. We are keen to play a part in encouraging people to stick with a programme or to come back into education for apprenticeships.

There was some reference in the funding announcement to unitary skills at tertiary level. I am looking forward to seeing whether that helps us with the apprenticeship discussion. I am not sure what it is about. There is a new idea - it is certainly new to me, at least - of new generation apprenticeships for industry. They tend to be in less traditional sectors like financial services, insurance and so on. The concept of apprenticeship needs parity of esteem, and we will do this by broadening understanding far outside the traditional crafts sector.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: On attracting people to compete with industry and instruct people, is there an issue with pay?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: I endorse what has been said about apprenticeships.

On the Deputy's question, there is an issue, which our governing board has only briefly discussed, regarding the academic contract in TUs. If we are to compete successfully for research funding, we probably have to be able to offer different kinds of academic contracts from the ones we can offer at the moment. That is a constraint that we are applying to ourselves in the TU system. We would like the HEA and the Department to consider a different kind of academic contract to free us up to engage in more research and innovative activity.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan: I welcome the witnesses. The last time I met Mr. Deenihan was at the event in MTU. It was an eye-opener for many of us on the committee, including me,

and I am from Cork. A great deal of investment is required and it is great to see the plans that MTU has for the future.

Before I came to this meeting, I was watching it on television upstairs. My initial question is for Mr. Deenihan. He stated that if MTU was given the money, it could eradicate its student accommodation crisis in Cork. Will he elaborate on that comment? What could MTU deliver and how would it go about tackling the student accommodation crisis in Bishopstown?

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: If we were allowed to borrow, we could at least start the process. There is always an opportunity for investment. I do not know what the situation was in Trinity, but the provision of accommodation on site at UCD was tax driven. Something like that could be considered. Perhaps such an approach was abused in the past in terms of hotels and the like, but we must consider innovative ways of providing student accommodation on campus.

There is a mix of private and public sector student accommodation on campus. Some of the committee members may have benefited from on-campus student accommodation in the past. It creates a special culture on a campus and a special connection with it. I attended the then National College of Physical Education, NCPE, when it opened in 1973 on the campus of the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick. There were just a few buildings there. I have visited it since, including the concert hall a few weeks ago. We are discussing accommodation in MTU, and I am struck by what having accommodation there means and why so many people want to go there. TUs will be competing with traditional universities that have accommodation on-site. We have to have that choice for parents who want to send their children to on-site accommodation. Based on experience and how matters work, if we were allowed to borrow just for accommodation, it would help. I am sure that many of the great buildings at UCC were built thanks to the European Investment Bank or the like.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: It is worth emphasising the point that the majority of student accommodation built in traditional universities was built with borrowed money. The business cases for building student accommodation are strong. If the TUs were allowed to borrow for student accommodation and we have the governance processes in place to manage that, we would find student accommodation popping up on the TU campuses around the country.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Yes.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: We could have purpose-built student accommodation that was built in a way that was cheaper for students than accessing accommodation in the private market. It seems like a good idea to at least facilitate TUs in borrowing to build student accommodation. The business cases for that are strong and everyone would benefit.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I agree with all of that. Building affordable student accommodation will be a challenge in the current market and would require a fair degree of creativity on the part of the TUs. As we discussed with Deputy O’Callaghan, the student base at TU Shannon is 60% SUSI grant supported. For that cohort of people, the housing would need to be designated as social housing to attract all the Government social housing supports. This would be another way of assisting the development of student accommodation in our catchment area; I am not speaking for the other TUs in terms of the social piece. Otherwise, if we simply borrow and build, our students will not be able to afford that accommodation no matter how creative we are in terms of how many we fit in and how we design. It is as simple as that.

In recent years, we have seen the development of a student body that is heavily dependent

on public transport. These students are going home or couch-surfing. This does not create the student centre that Mr. Deenihan mentioned. Accommodation is not just about having a place to sleep; it is also about building a culture for the TU among the student body so that students are not arriving exhausted and going home in the evening. They do not join societies because they cannot. There is a cultural piece and a well-being piece, and all of that is connected with having good housing, but it also has to be housing that can be afforded.

Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan: When I was teaching, I noticed that more and more girls, particularly at second level, were taking on STEM subjects, especially woodwork, metalwork and so on. It was encouraging to see that progressing over the years. How are we fixed at third level in regard to female participation? Is there more that we can do to encourage it? Should there be specific grants to encourage greater female participation? I am unsure, so what are the witnesses thoughts on this matter?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: At Trinity College Dublin, where I used to work, 60% of the students are now women. It is in specific disciplines that issues arise, typically engineering. Computer science is another. There are good employment opportunities and careers to be had at the end of computer science courses, but less than 20% of students on some courses are women. There are specific courses and disciplines where we need to pay attention.

I am not familiar with the apprenticeship piece. I must read into it more. I have only been doing this job for three weeks, but I will look into it and learn more about apprenticeships. I imagine that issues also arise in that context.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Female participation there is very low. It is nearly invisible. As TUs develop, we must encourage greater female participation. There are certain programmes and craft apprenticeships that would be more suitable for girls than others. Of the range of available apprenticeship opportunities, some are probably more saleable than others. However, due to EDI and so on, it should be a focus of TUs to encourage females to pursue apprenticeships more. As Ms Feehily and Dr. Prendergast set out, there is a range of apprenticeships into which they can go and some of the apprenticeship programmes would be attractive, perhaps apart from the more physical ones. That said, I have seen women in those areas and they have done well.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I am glad Mr. Deenihan finished well. I was about to say I disagreed with him but he recovered towards the end. I do not think anything is unsuitable for women. The traditional craft apprenticeship is not governed by the TUs. We did what was called the block in my time but I do not know what it is called these days. I referenced the new national apprenticeship board, and it is now SOLAS. There is action required in order to encourage and mandate positive action and, indeed, positive discrimination. That is entirely possible perfectly reasonable when a group is under-represented.

The TUs have a role in traditional apprenticeships up to apprenticeship level, beyond which is our space and we are happy to claim it as apprentices move up the academic ladder. At the apprenticeship level, the student body is heavily directed towards us by SOLAS and employers. There is serious scope for positive action at that level in terms of role modelling with girls’ schools and making it clear in general that there is a good living to be made.

I sat on the platform for graduations in Athlone last October, when I was all of three weeks into my position. I was shocked at the gendered nature of the programmes. The day we did the engineering programmes, there was a handful of women. The day we did the nursing pro-

grammes, there was a handful of men. I had not seen anything quite so stark in a very long time. There is a lot of work to be done and the focus on STEM subjects is only the start.

On the positive side, the handful of women who were on the engineering programmes were moving up the value chain and into research and PhDs. There were more women at the higher end of engineering than there were in the basic degree course. That was a bit of a relief. However, the Deputy is right that there is a lot of work to be done.

Chairman: I also have a few questions. I was reminded of something but I will not say where I was or how I heard about it. Mr. Deenihan said there were no female toilets in one block in one of the colleges, and I thought how times have changed. We have now to accommodate both males and females because women are now able to do whatever men are able to do. That is fantastic. I heard a woman who is doing a plumbing apprenticeship talking on “Liveline”. A householder said she would rather see a female than a male coming through the door. She did not give the reason why but it was interesting to hear.

I want to follow up on student accommodation. It is going to be, and is already, an enormous challenge for families. When considering education, the cost of accommodation is the highlight for them. Have the colleges worked together to try to solve the issue? Is there an opportunity for the colleges to work together to try to solve the accommodation crisis and the challenges that exist? Would it be possible to bring someone in to build not just for one college but for multiple campuses? I would be interested to hear our guests’ views on that.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: That is a pertinent question. A STEM building is being provided on the north campus of MTU in Tralee, which is one of a number of projects that have come together through the HEA. If we come together, we could do a project to provide accommodation on-site. There is no doubt about that. After today, we will be discussing matters between ourselves. I know there is an executive function here with regard to the college and the presidents are involved. However, as chairpersons, this issue is something on which we will put emphasis. We are all new to the job, some are newer than others, but we will put emphasis on this area because of our discussion with the committee. This is something Dr. Prendergast, Ms Feehily and I can do together. We can connect with the Government as well to come up with creative ideas.

To give a small example, the sports academy in Tralee was a kind of private public partnership. Considerable money was collected from the private sector, which was then matched by money from the public sector. There is now a state-of-the-art product at MTU in Tralee. Something similar is happening in Cork, perhaps without the same ratio between private and public funding. That project in Cork is happening with money that was saved in the past. It can be done. There are good examples already where it was done to some extent. That is something we will take from today’s meeting. We will collaborate and try to find some solutions.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: When it comes to student accommodation, an important element of the TUs is that we are making university education more local and bringing it into the regions. We hope people will not have to go into student accommodation and will be able to commute. A student living in Wexford will, we hope, be able to get a university education in Wexford. The same is true of a student living in Waterford because university education will be available nearby. That is a good thing. We will also do more online education so people do not have to travel. Perhaps they will be able to do more of their course work at home.

Student accommodation is a complicated thing. Much of student accommodation is built

to double up as rental properties over the summer. It is high quality, with en suite bathrooms in every room and all of that. In many other countries, student accommodation has shared bathrooms at the end of a corridor. Those are much cheaper to build. Perhaps we should think in those terms about building purpose-built student accommodation rather than building student accommodation that doubles up as a hotel over the summer. The latter is obviously more expensive to build because a building need to be constructed to a higher quality, with better fittings and all of that, if it is to be rented out as accommodation over the summer. There is probably scope for a task force to look into how to better provide student accommodation not just in the TUs, as Mr. Deenihan said, but throughout the higher education sector overall. Those are my thoughts.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I agree. My main contribution in response to the question from Deputy Pádraig O’Sullivan was around the social and affordability piece. Whatever the solution is, it must be affordable.

TUS depends entirely on the private sector. We are extremely worried about the coming autumn because the private sector that would have provided accommodation in the past is now occupied and unlikely to become unoccupied by September. The accommodation is, unfortunately, now largely occupied by people from Ukraine. We are extremely concerned about where we will find capacity. As it happens, the governing body discussed the issue yesterday at the behest of the students’ union. We have agreed to help with a marketing campaign to encourage the rent-a-room scheme and so on. We will encourage individuals who have a spare room to provide more traditional forms of student accommodation. It is going to be a big problem in the immediate term.

In the longer term, of course we should talk and share ideas. The loosening of borrowing is a part of that. The kind of ideas that Dr. Prendergast mentioned about a particular standard for student accommodation would be very interesting to discuss and to see where the Government would sit on funding something of a different standard for students. I do not know the answer. Dr. Prendergast mentioned the idea and that was the first time I heard of it. I had not thought of it and I need to think about it. The affordability piece is the main line from the student body in TUS.

Chairman: I will move to the question of philanthropic funding. I do not like making a distinction between the main universities and TUs because I think they are equal. For any student who is getting a qualification, a university qualification from a TU is equally as important as any other university qualification. I know some of the universities are very good at attracting philanthropic funding. Could we broaden that a little to include private sector funding? Mr. Deenihan mentioned the pharma industry and Dr. Prendergast and I have seen the financial sector in Wexford. Pharma is not as big in the south east generally, although there are pharmaceutical companies in Waterford. Do the witnesses believe they can attract private financing for the TU sector from philanthropy and private funding by tailoring courses so that they might be able to get suitably qualified people to work within their sector when they are finished their college education?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: Philanthropy will be very interesting. In my previous job in TCD, we were very successful with philanthropic fundraising. I hope that in a few months, perhaps when we get governance issues straightened out, we will have a conversation about that in SETU to see where we can go and if we can develop a philanthropic fundraising unit within the university. It is one of the big differences between the financing of universities and technological universities. Only 40% of Trinity College’s revenue is from the Exchequer, the rest

of it is commercial revenue, research revenue and philanthropy, whereas the non-Exchequer component of SETU's revenue is much smaller.

The Chairman is correct that there is an opportunity to grow, but it does mean that the technological universities, and SETU anyway, are more dependent on Government funding than the traditional universities because we do not have the same access to philanthropy, commercial revenue and research revenue. The best way to put it is that it is early days when it comes to philanthropy at least in SETU and the TUs overall. We are in a process and on a road to do more of it, and to get more commercial revenue by doing things jointly with industry, as the Chairman outlined, in particular on course development. As the years go by, I expect we will see non-Exchequer revenue streams increase into TUs, but as it stands at the moment, we are very much reliant on public sector, Exchequer funding, as we discussed earlier.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: At least 40% of the funding for the college that was built in Tralee was provided through philanthropy. I know a fair bit about philanthropy because I knew the American market pretty well for projects I was involved with in County Kerry. When I was Minister of State with responsibility for the diaspora, I had a special fund for the traditional universities at that time to develop their alumni process. The TUs in the past were generally small units and they did not have the same structure there. They did not capitalise on it or put emphasis on it in the same way as the traditional universities. Now we are all doing strategies at the moment and the whole alumni aspect of it is one thing I will make sure will be in MTU's strategy. It is very important. I know that from my connection with UL as we are contacted on a regular basis and there is no doubt that it does pay dividends.

Ms Josephine Feehily: TUS has put its toe in the water in the alumni space with some very modest success. It is nothing like the university sector. Dr. Prendergast put his finger on it. It is one of the things I had in mind when I mentioned capacity building. If we are going to go into this line of business, we need professionals to run it. We need to build the capacity. There is not a capacity within the TUs to run that at scale, any more than there is capacity in terms of borrowing. When I talked about building institutional capacity, if we are going to change our business model from being 99.something%-Government funded to something less than that with borrowing and philanthropy, we need a different operating model and a different governance set-up. Apart from anything else, the HEA would expect it. There is a way to go before we would be confident in doing it, but that should not stop us having a conversation about it.

I made a bit of a plea earlier about core funding and getting money into the base. What we can do with discretionary money like that is heavily related to capital or equipment, because it is not recurring. That often expects matching funding and it also then comes back to the borrowing piece. It is kind of all of a piece in some ways. We need to get the funding foundations right. We need a transparent model from the HEA. I am less bothered about precisely how the money is shared out between TUs and universities, as long as it is transparently clear that there is parity of esteem. We must get the foundations right and get it into the base.

Mr. Deenihan mentioned multi-annual funding. We need the certainty of multi-annual funding. We cannot commit to something if it is only going to run for one academic year, which is only nine months. That is one of the things that I am finding really hard to adjust to. Everything stops in June. I am trying to arrange meetings in July and August, and they are all looking at me as if I am mad. Nine months is just too short. We need a commitment to multi-annual funding in the base and then we would have the freedom to start thinking creatively about philanthropy, the governance around it and what it might be used for because it will have to be a one-off. It cannot be funding for pay, for example. It is complex, but it still has to be in the mix in the

future.

Chairman: Something that impressed me with the setting up of the TUs was the calibre of the people who are willing to serve. I say this genuinely: the three witnesses come from very highly regarded career backgrounds. Many other people in the private sector would love to have them as chair of their boards, but in fairness to them, they have seen the positives and the road ahead for TUs and what they can achieve.

Do they believe there is enough liaison between primary, post-primary and higher level educators? At one point, people went to primary school and then secondary school and either they went to college or they did not go to college. In recent years, there may have been too much emphasis on people having to go to college. The perception is that apprenticeships are not good enough. I commend the Minister, Deputy Harris, on including apprenticeships in the CAO system and having a university qualification. He is putting apprenticeships up in lights. I hope the Department and the Minister will follow through on that. It is easy to talk, but we must put the building blocks in place. Do the witnesses believe more collaboration is required between primary, secondary and third level?

Last week, we published our report on reform of the leaving certificate. One of the issues related to school libraries. The Library Association of Ireland came to us about this issue. It makes sense that there should be good libraries in every secondary school. Students in secondary school will know then what is facing them in third level and how to get the best use from the school library. What are the views of the witnesses in that regard?

Ms Feehily comes from Revenue and she is now involved in education as chair of a TU. Mr. Deenihan is a former Minister and a Deputy for many years. Dr. Prendergast is a former provost of Trinity College. They have many years of experience. I would be interested in their views. I will call Ms Feehily first. Ladies first.

Ms Josephine Feehily: It is not something I have thought of hugely, except in a practical way. Yesterday, we were discussing the impact of this year's leaving certificate in terms of the practical side for third level of how to manage if the CAO offers are late. That is the only thinking I have done about the collaboration. Logically, we would expect that there should be a continuum. One would hope that the various curriculum reforms would feed not just into an end in themselves but would equip students both practically in how to use a library but also how to learn in the different way that is required. It is very much self-managed, as one moves up. There is some space for including that kind of developmental stuff in the curriculum earlier so that students are not disadvantaged. Some students really miss the support systems when they come to third level. To the extent I have thought about it, it is a heavily student-based focus on how to equip him or her for the experience of third level right through, and the practical collaboration, which does take place. The TUs will play their part, and have done for the past several years, in accommodating additional students and timetable issues, but it does not give the best outcome for the student experience if he or she arrives and there is not, for example, appropriate time for first-year orientation, which is what happened to a fair extent last year.

The other point on whether there is too much focus on having to go to college aged 18 or 19 is well made. All of the third level and further education sector, and especially the TUs, very strongly market lifelong learning. I am a lifelong learner. I regard it as more of that, but the whole lifelong learning piece is something that also needs to be valued in a way it perhaps is not always. The emphasis on lifelong learning is something the TUs bring to the table, often in partnership with industry but not always. I am very pleased to now be able to bring that through

to PhD level in a TU context.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: By coincidence, over the past few days, I was thinking about that connection between primary and tertiary education and encouraging young people to think about apprenticeships for the future. It is so important now because of the challenge we face as a society in getting craftspeople. It is getting more acute. We will bring people in from Europe to do many of these jobs, such as building, plastering, plumbing and electrical work. This is what will happen because the numbers are just not there. It is important to point those jobs out to people, first, to see if they have an aptitude, to ensure they are exposed to the types of apprenticeship they might like, and that this is then developed through the post-primary system.

I will suggest to my colleagues, including the board of governors and the executive and so on, that TUs will have to go out to the schools to sell themselves, talk to young people about apprenticeships and even bring them to see apprentices in action in the TUs. We also have a job of work to do to sell the attractiveness of apprenticeships to the young population which, as we know, is increasing. There will be an increase of 35% in the next ten years.

It should be emphasised there will be major pressure on accommodation in TUs and the traditional universities. We do not provide classroom accommodation. There is plenty of equipment, as I pointed out in my opening statement. There is no problem with equipment but there is a major problem with space. Some 60,000 sq. m of space is needed in MTU alone. There is a major issue there. I totally agree that the understanding of apprenticeships has to be introduced at a very early age.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: The point is well made. I will not speak about the connection between primary and secondary education. I do not know too much about that but we need to think more about how secondary to university works. At present, it is almost entirely mediated by the CAO, which is a competitive points system.

The major issue that needs some work is the connection between further education and higher education. That is why this Government did something innovative, dare I say, in creating the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and connecting those areas up, at least at departmental level. I can only assume it is getting people to think about how further education and higher education link up. There should be pathways between the two. We should not just end up with someone saying, "Here is higher education, here is further education and if I go the further education route I can't go this way and, likewise, if I go the higher education route I can't get into further education". There have to be pathways between the two. That is something the TUs are ideally placed to provide.

Chairman: I will come back to my two colleagues in a second. I have a question for Dr. Prendergast. I was delighted to see him tweet this morning from the Carlow campus at SETU, where students from the FCJ Secondary School in Bunclody in my constituency were being shown around the campus. That is so important. This leads me to my other question. We talked about STEM subjects. I believe colleges, universities and TUs can do much more to attract more students to STEM. Working with career guidance teachers is one issue. Mr. Deenihan will recall that one of the cutbacks at the time he was in government was in career guidance teachers. It was a major issue. I thought it was the wrong decision, even though I sat at the Cabinet table, but we were in very difficult economic times and it was rolled in with the responsibilities of the school. Career guidance teachers in schools are so important. Does Dr. Prendergast believe, as I do, an awful lot more can be done in conjunction with those positions, including liaising with career guidance teachers on STEM subjects to encourage more students

to participate in them?

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: A lot more can indeed be done. I also thought that decision was wrong at the time. I was provost of Trinity College Dublin when it was made. Of course, there was a financial challenge and the Government had to do what it had to do, but it was not very just in the sense that many middle class parents can afford to get career guidance separately, or get a consultant or whatever, whereas many from socio-economically challenged backgrounds might not. They were dependent on the school career guidance teacher and, when he or she disappeared, had no guidance, especially in STEM subjects. Many people understand what a teacher or lawyer does, but they might not understand what a pharmaceutical technologist is. A lot of the STEM subjects are that bit more difficult for parents to give advice to their children on. That is where the career guidance teacher comes in and why it is so important to give specific career guidance on STEM subjects these guidance counsellors were able to provide.

I am happy to say I am giving a talk next week at Enniscorthy Community College. I was provost of Trinity for ten years and they never invited me but as soon as I became chair of SETU I got the invitation to Enniscorthy. I am delighted to accept it. I will be there next week.

Chairman: Trinity College should not be out of anybody's reach but people see it as a kind of barrier. There are now people who have gone to Trinity whose parents would never have dreamed their sons or daughters would even pass by its gates in years gone by, which is fantastic. I have no doubt Deputy Conway-Walsh has one or two questions.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I always have another question.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: The Deputy has been very good. She has been there all the time.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I am interested. There are some issues I could go over regarding the borrowing. The Chairman might allow me a little more time. I have some concerns around public-private contracts and how the TUs see their set-up. If the representatives were in a position tomorrow morning to be able to borrow and invest, how would we make sure the accommodation is owned by the campus, and publicly owned, rather than through public-private contracts that may end up costing us much more in the end? Have they put any thought into that? We need a discussion specifically on accommodation and we need a new student accommodation strategy. We have been requesting that these issues be discussed.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Of course. The Deputy raised a very good point because there have been bad experiences in the past. We first have to look at it seriously to see if we can find a proper approach to it. That would be part of it. At present, we have a burn-in system where people in the private sector will shortly build a STEM building in MTU, Tralee. Others will also be built throughout the country under the same system, but there are considerations that would have to be looked at. If there is private funding, then who owns the property? That is a big issue at present in another field. These considerations are very important because we do not want, as Dr. Prendergast mentioned, five-star accommodation and then ordinary accommodation that would cost a lot less. The best approach would probably be for the TUs to borrow the money and build accommodation themselves and then get back the funding over a period through renting to our students. Rather than the accommodation being built for profit, it should just accommodate our students. That would be a very good model if it could be done.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: That would be good. I think that is what we would-----

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: It has not been thought through to any great extent. Student accom-

modation is in our master plan in respect of Tralee, for example, and I am sure it is the same in Cork, but it has never been determined how it will be provided. That is a debate on which I will consult my colleagues.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: I wish to ask the witnesses about two other issues. First, Mr. Deenihan cited mental health and well-being supports. I am concerned that we are not meeting the need and the demand in the third level sector for mental health supports. I am particularly concerned about services being bought in on an *ad hoc* basis, according to what can be afforded at the time. I would like us to get to a position where, if we are serious about addressing mental health issues and supports within the sector, we can properly employ people instead in order that we have certainty that this is not just done annually.

Second, the new HEA Bill provides for North-South student mobility, which I am very pleased about. I have had many discussions with the Minister and his Department about this. How do the witnesses see that they can implement that within their institutions to encourage more North-South student mobility to increase the opportunities across the island?

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: The Deputy raised some very important points. MTU is a leader on mental health and well-being supports, and that has been recognised. It went national on the support mechanisms it has. Members might have seen that on the television and so on. It is very much part of the policy of MTU. The students' union also played a very important role in formulating that policy and the support mechanisms for the students. MTU is very well recognised as having a policy on that. Of course, it can be improved in the future. The healthy university status is a very important one to arrive at. All TUs should strive for that so they are designated healthy universities.

What was the last point the Deputy made again?

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: It was about North-South student mobility.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: Yes. I totally agree with the Deputy. There seems to be a lot more people travelling north than coming south. I know that some northern people come to Trinity, but a number of people I know go to Belfast to do master's degrees or whatever else. There does not seem to be the same flow to the South. That could be part of our strategy. The international student strategy is very strong. I am not saying that people coming from Northern Ireland are international students, but it is a very important point and I will advise the people doing the strategy that they might include that interchange between the North and the South as part of the strategy. There was a famous project that did not turn out too well, the *Jeanie Johnston*. It can be seen in front of the emigration museum. It was supposed to wind up in Kerry but wound up in the Dublin docklands, which is great as they are looking after it very well. That was an example of North-South co-operation. Young apprentices came down from east Belfast, for example, who had never been south before. They worked with people from west Belfast. They came down and worked together with the young people of Kerry and other parts of Ireland and it was a huge success, but there have been very few similar examples since the *Jeanie Johnston* was built. I agree totally with the Deputy. I think it will be very much part of TUs' approach in the future to attract students from and to collaborate with the northern universities, the Ulster universities, in promoting that. Dr. Prendergast would probably have very strong views on this.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: I can say some more about it if the Deputy would like me to do so.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Yes, please.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: First, I have asked about mental health services, although the president of SETU will be able to say much more about it than me. It seems, as things stand, that we are able to meet our capacity needs with counsellors and so on in student mental health, so we are managing it at the moment, it seems, but we have not had a direct briefing on the governing body, so I cannot say much more than that.

North-South student mobility is a really interesting topic. Deputy Conway-Walsh is right. Half the students coming south from Northern Ireland come to Trinity, it turns out. There are traditional, historical reasons for that. It is still very few. I think only something like 2% of Trinity students are from Northern Ireland, so the percentage must be much smaller in many other institutions. Why are there so few northern students coming south? For many years we ran a programme in Trinity, when I was provost there, called the Northern Ireland engagement programme, going into secondary schools and high schools in Northern Ireland and telling them about Trinity. Many of them do not know how to apply to the CAO. It is kind of complicated because the points change every year. We understand it but they do not. Some schools welcomed us with open arms and some did not want to see us at all. It is not straightforward. Then students who would want to come south needed specific careers guidance as to how to apply to the CAO and they might not have been able to get it. Every year until Brexit, the number of students coming from Northern Ireland increased. In the year of Brexit it dropped, and that was because of fee uncertainty. The students did not know whether they would be subject to the non-EU fee. Thankfully, the Minister provided clarity on that, but every year since the number of students coming to Trinity from Northern Ireland has dropped. I guess if we look at the whole system we will see what is happening. I have not looked into SETU's data and I must do that sometime, but I imagine there are handfuls of northern students, probably dropping every year. If we want to improve student mobility on the island of Ireland, we probably need a specific policy on it. We need fee certainty such that, no matter what happens, students in Northern Ireland coming south will pay only the EU fee and, likewise, students from the Republic of Ireland going north will pay only the EU fee. There should be a programme giving information to students in high schools and secondary schools in Northern Ireland about how to apply through the CAO.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: We are examining some barriers as it is, but I think there are opportunities with the TUs. Ms Feehily wanted to respond.

Chairman: It is coming up to 1 o'clock and I would like to-----

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: Yes.

Chairman: We will let Ms Feehily finish.

Ms Josephine Feehily: I completely endorse everything that has been said about mental health and well-being. We need a mix of a permanent structure and the capacity to buy in exceptional services because we cannot provide every kind of service. That is the model that should be striven for. Mr. Deenihan spoke about striving. That is where we are all the time with this because the pressures change.

I will be really interested to see how the HEA plans to operationalise the North-South element. It is one thing, as I know, to have something in law; it is quite another to actually make it happen. One of the pieces Tús has been really active on is an organisation called the Regional

University Network - European University, RUN-EU. Two students start their degrees with Tús and finish them somewhere else and *vice versa*, or they go for a middle year or part of a programme. There is experience there as to how trans-regional programmes involving the European Union, well supported by EU funding, operate. There is some really good material that would help operationalise the North-South element. In addition to the fees and so on, there is probably a need for courses that provide mutual recognition of qualifications. They should also allow students to do modules here and modules there and to earn microcredentials while prior learning is recognised. All of those pieces are needed and there are trans-European models that could be copied where Tús has a huge amount of really interesting experience in the last few years.

Chairman: I thank the three witnesses for appearing before the committee. I am sure that everybody will agree with me when I say we have had an excellent discussion and exchange of views. The members and I very much appreciate the attendance of the chairpersons and I thank the members for their views.

The chairpersons specifically asked for a number of issues to be included in our recommendations and funding is definitely very much part of that. If they feel that the committee can assist them in their roles then please do not hesitate to contact any of the members or the clerk to the committee because the chairpersons hold a very important position.

Mr. Jimmy Deenihan: The committee is very welcome to visit and contact us too in Kerry and Cork.

Chairman: No bother. I thank Mr. Deenihan. We will definitely get to the south east, Dr. Prendergast. We did not get there yet but we will.

Dr. Patrick Prendergast: The committee and members are always welcome. Please visit us on some date in September.

The joint committee adjourned at 1.01 p.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 24 May 2022.