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Briefing Paper

General Scheme of Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026
Policy and Legislative Briefing Paper

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General Scheme Briefing Paper

Abstract

This briefing paper examines the policy and legislative context to the General Scheme of the Technological Universities (Amendment) All Island University Group Bill 2026. The proposed Bill seeks to provide a legislative basis for Dundalk Institute of Technology to become a university college of Queen's University Belfast on the basis of a North/South all-island strategic partnership.

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Executive Summary

The General Scheme of the Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026 (the Bill) was approved by Government on 28 April 2026 and published by the Department of Further and Higher Education Innovation Research and Science on 07 May 2026. The Bill proposes amendments to the Technological Universities Act 2018 to provide for Dundalk Institute of Technology to apply to become a Technological University College, and enter a strategic partnership with Queen's University Belfast, becoming 'Dundalk Technological University College, a college of Queen's University Belfast'.

The aim of the proposed legislation is to facilitate the establishment of this all-island partnership between Dundalk Institute of Technology and Queen's University Belfast. The proposed partnership will be structured around shared academic provision, close collaboration in research and innovation, and the alignment of cross-jurisdictional quality assurance standards. Under the partnership the newly established Dundalk Technological University College will deliver programmes validated by Queen's University Belfast, with the awards conferred by Queen's University Belfast. The Bill also proposes to retain the statutory autonomy of Dundalk Technological University College, and that it continues to operate as a designated HEI within Ireland. Through the partnership, the Bill will establish the first all-island University Group.

To allow for the operational requirements of the jurisdictional duality of the institutions, the General Scheme proposes to separate Dundalk Technological University College's executive and financial governance from its academic alignment. Management of the budget, assets, staffing and student affairs will remain administered by Dundalk Technological University College while academic standards and qualifications will be overseen and awarded by Queen's University Belfast. The Bill also includes provisions allowing Dundalk Technological University College to enter into another partnership, should the partnership with QUB be dissolved at any future point

Key Areas provided for in the General Scheme include:

1. Creation of a new category of Higher Education Institute (HEI) specifically for Dundalk, the "Technological University College".
2. Establishment of the first All-Island University Group.
3. Retention of institutional autonomy of Dundalk Technological University College Autonomy, with separation of governance and funding from academic governance.

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Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Meaning
DkIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
DkTUC	Dundalk Technological University College (as proposed)
HEA	The Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
The Higher Education Authority Act 2022 (The 2022 Act)	An Act to provide for changes to the functions and governance of An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas and the oversight by it of higher education providers which are designated institutions of higher education under this Act
IADT	Institute of Art and Design Technology (Dún Laoghaire)
The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 (The 2006 Act)	An act to amend the Regional Technical Colleges Acts 1992 to 2001, to amend the Dublin Institute of Technology Acts 1992 to 2001, to amend the Higher Education Authority Act 1971, to amend the Universities Act 1997, to amend the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, to repeal sections 19, 37 and 38 of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001, and to provide for related matters
IT	Institute of Technology
NFQ	Irish National Framework of Qualifications
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the UK regulatory body for higher education)
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (The Irish regulatory body for higher education)
QUB	Queens University, Belfast

Term	Meaning
The Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992 (The 1992 Act)	An act to provide for the organisation and development of regional technical and other colleges, to define their functions, and to modify the provisions of Section 7 of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 1944 , and to provide for other matters connected with the foregoing.
The Technological Universities Act 2018 (The 2018 Act)	An Act to provide for the establishment, functions, and governance of technological universities.
TU	Technological University
TUC	Technological University College
The Universities Act 1997 (The 1997 Act)	An act to constitute or establish certain colleges and universities as universities under this act, to allow for the incorporation of educational institutions as parts of universities or as universities in their own right, to amend certain other acts, and for connected purposes.

Introduction

The dissolution of Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) and establishment of Dundalk Technological University College (DkTUC), a college of Queen's University, Belfast (QUB), via the planned strategic partnership was announced jointly by both institutions in November 2025.[1] The Heads of Agreement between the two universities were formally endorsed in March 2026,[2] with an update on the timeline and progress of the partnership announced in May 2026.[3]

The General Scheme of the Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026 (the Bill) was approved by Government on 28 April 2026 and was published by the Department of Further and Higher Education Innovation Research and Science on 07 May 2026, alongside the Regulatory Impact Assessment. The Bill proposes amendments to the Technological Universities Act 2018 to provide that DkIT may enter a strategic partnership with QUB and become a Technological University College (TUC) in accordance with a process as set out in the proposed legislation. On completion of this process and with the agreement of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (The Minister), DkIT will be dissolved and established as a TUC, which will then enter into a partnership as a college of QUB.

The General Scheme was referred to the Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education Research Innovation and Science (The Committee) for Pre-Legislative Scrutiny (PLS) on 01 May 2026. During PLS there were two public hearings – the first, attended by representatives from the HEA and QQI was held on 27 May 2026, with a further hearing attended by representatives from DkIT and QUB taking place on 10 June 2026. The PLS Report was published on 09 July 2026.

This briefing paper provides analysis of the legislative and policy context to the proposed legislation, and considers the approach taken in the general scheme to address the policy issues and implications of same. The paper does not provide an exhaustive analysis of resources, but draws on material from secondary sources including Departmental documents, existing legislation such as the 2018 Act, institutional policy and strategic plans from QUB, DkIT and relevant bodies such as the HEA, and from relevant reports such as the 2023 ESRI Student Mobility In Ireland And Northern Ireland report[4] and the 2022 Oireachtas North South

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[1] Queen's and Dundalk Institute of Technology to establish University College in Dundalk, 19 November 2025, Queen's University Belfast

[2] Dundalk Institute of Technology and Queen's University Belfast celebrate the next chapter in growing partnership, 3rd March 2026, DkIT News

[3] DkIT and Queen's University Belfast partnership moves forward, May 2026, Drogheda Life

[4] ESRI, Smyth & Darmody (2023), Student Mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland Report

Student Enrolment in Tertiary Education report,[5] as well as both DkIT and QUB's institutional regulations and frameworks.

Overview of the Policy and Legislative Context

To provide context and background of the current policy and legislative landscape relevant to the proposed legislation, the following section provides an overview of where the proposed partnership fits within the context of the Shared Island Initiative. This is followed by an outline of the current institutional arrangements including the collaborative relationship between DkIT and QUB as well as the collegiate systems (where present), executive governance, financial governance, and academic standards of both HEIs. It also provides a comparative profile of the course catalogues, staff, and student bodies of both institutions, and an overview of the current bi-directional flow of students between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Shared Island Initiative

The Shared Island Initiative, established in 2020 as a whole of government initiative[6] with a strategic focus on the future of the whole island aims to enhance cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding on the island of Ireland, and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future. The initiative includes working with the Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government to address strategic challenges faced on the island of Ireland, further developing the all-island economy, deepening North/South cooperation, investing in the North West and border regions, fostering constructive and inclusive dialogue and a comprehensive programme of research to support the building of consensus around a shared future on the island.[7] The National Development Plan (2021-2030)[8] sets out an ambition for collaborative all-island investment to create a more connected, sustainable and prosperous island for all.

The institutional restructuring and subsequent partnership provided for by the proposed legislation represents a landmark initiative in cross-border integration.[9] While an all-island HEI is not a specific goal of the initiative, it has been acknowledged by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science as a "...practical expression of the

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[5] Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (July 2022) - North South Student Enrolment in Tertiary Education

[6] Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement (23 September 2025) - Debate

[7] As per the Shared Island initiative

[8] See Chapter 17 of the National Development Plan 2021-2030

[9] Departmental Press Release (28 April 2026) Minister Lawless secures Government approval for legislation enabling first All-Island University group between Dundalk Institute of Technology and Queen's University Belfast

Government's Shared Island Initiative…",[10] all-island developments within the education sphere have been noted as a success, and approaching new policy initiatives through a shared island lens has been stated as the future of the initiative[11]. By formally partnering an Irish HEI with a Northern Irish HEI, the proposed Bill will create the first formal all-island HEI. From a Shared Island Initiative perspective, the proposed institutional partnership extends beyond academic teaching and feeds directly into the wider North South Research Programme (NSRP),[12] establishing a network of Joint Research and Innovation Centres between the partnered HEIs.

Current institutional arrangements

QUB

QUB operates as an autonomous self-governed institution and a registered charity (Charity Number NIC102044). Its governance is dictated by a Royal Charter, supported by specific statutes and regulations, originally signed in 1908 following the establishment of QUB under the Irish Universities Act 1908, and last revised in February 2025 QUB Charter, Statutes, and Regulations 2025. The governing body of the university, the Senate, is responsible for the general conduct of university affairs, the strategic direction of the university, and the management and administration of revenue and property. It is presided over by the Pro-Chancellor and is comprised of external lay members, academic staff, support staff, and student representatives.

The President and Vice-Chancellor of QUB oversees executive leadership, and reports directly to the Senate, while the University Management Board (UMB) has delegated responsibility for the day-to-day operational management of the University. The Academic Council controls academic affairs, including teaching, research, and quality assurance. It provides an annual Academic Assurance Statement to the Senate to maintain strict regulatory compliance.

While DkIT is currently a single independent HEI, and, following enactment of the proposed legislation, will be QUB's first cross-border college, QUB has had two constituent University Colleges since 1968 - St Mary's University College Belfast, and Queen's and Stranmillis University College. Both St. Mary's and Stranmillis retain their autonomous institutional identity, executive governance, and financial governance, while being academically integrated with QUB. In both partnerships, QUB is the academic awarding body, and academic programmes offered by the two University College's must align with QUB's quality assurance frameworks. As previously noted, this is the same structural model which the proposed Bill

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[10] Legislation to be drafted for 'landmark' link between Queen's and Dundalk IT, 28 April 2026, Ireland Live

[11] Shared Island Unit head Émer Deane Interview - An ordinary way of thinking, May 2025, AgendaNI

[12] Taoiseach and Minister Lawless announce outcomes of the second call for the North-South Research Programme, 11 August 2025, HEA

aims to replicate with the DkTUC and QUB partnership regarding academic integration, autonomy, governance, and funding.

DkIT

DkIT operates as an independent HEI, subject to statutory law provided for primarily by the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, the Institutes of Technology Act 2006, and the Higher Education Authority Act 2022. The Governing Body of DkIT is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the institution, managing the budget, and ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation as well as the Code of Governance for Irish Institutes of Technology, and is accountable to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Executive and operational management is delegated to the institute's Executive Board, while academic standards are overseen by the Academic Council. DkIT has been a Designated Awarding Body under Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) since 01 January 2020 and may award its own qualifications up to and including NFQ Level 9.

Current DkIT-QUB alliance

Prior to the formal announcement of the proposed partnership and the TUC framework, DkIT and QUB already have a well-established history of cross-border academic and research integration, driven primarily by EU-funded programmes and their positioning on the Dublin–Belfast economic corridor. While not explicitly stating the QUB partnership as proposed, the current DkIT Strategic Plan 2024-2028 notes this established QUB alliance under its first Goal (see pp28) – "To achieve University status and strategically engage with the Further and Higher Education Sector to deliver on our regional remit", noting that:

> *"The Institute has built strong alliances with University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast over the past decades. These are important and distinguished collaborative alliances that benefits students, staff and communities on a cross-border basis. These relationships are critical for the development of the All-Island Economy in infrastructure, health, climate, enterprise, etc. As a major and critical contributor to the development of the cross-border region and the All-Island Economy, DkIT will seek to build on its successes to date and further expand and strengthen these alliances in such areas as research and innovation and enterprise development"* (pp29)

Additionally, the strategic plan formally states its objective to "strategically align with an identified University partner to determine a pathway to achieve University status."

QUB's current Strategic Plan, Strategy 2030 does not refer to DkIT specifically but does note, under its Strategic Priority: Research and Innovation on pp10 that it will:

> *"...expand our reach through co-operation and strategic collaborations, building research partnerships locally, nationally and internationally. We will work with*

partners to address the common challenges across these islands, with UK and Ireland-wide initiatives".

The pre-existing collaborative relationship between the two institutions is further demonstrated through their involvement in the BREATH Project (Border and Regions Airways Training Hub), a cross-border health science partnership. This initiative, which was completed in 2022, linked DkIT with QUB[13] to address the high regional prevalence of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) across Western Scotland and the border regions of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The project yielded significant research outputs, resulting in 80 joint publications and the successful cross-border training of 28 PhD candidates.[14]

The collegiate system and academic awards

As DkTUC will become a college of QUB under the proposed legislation, this section provides an overview of the operational mechanics governing QUB's existing collegiate institutions. It describes the proposed structure of the DkTUC partnership, and the legislative designation of qualification awarding authority to QUB under the General Scheme of the proposed Bill.

To understand the collegiate model of the new cross-border partnership, it is useful to consider the framework of QUB with its two current domestic university colleges - St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College. As provided for under the Irish Universities Act 1908 and significantly revised within the 2025 Royal Charter and Statutes of Queen's University Belfast, these collegiate partnerships operate as models of administrative separation with academic integration. Both St Mary's and Stranmillis maintain institutional independence, with separate governing bodies, autonomous asset ownership, and independent employment frameworks[15]. They are both funded directly by the Northern Ireland Department for the Economy (DfE) and are not provided for through QUB's budget or financial governance. Academically, the two colleges are not recognised bodies with independent qualification awarding powers but are incorporated within QUB's quality assurance and academic standards structures. This means the Academic Council of QUB governs curriculum design, module changes, and exam protocols within the colleges, while students are registered as QUB students and graduate with degrees validated and conferred directly by QUB. This is where the proposed legislation providing for the DkTUC partnership diverges.

Although the partnership with DkTUC will be QUB's first cross-border university college, the General Scheme of the proposed Technological Universities (Amendment) All Island University Group Bill 2026 replicates this model insofar as retaining full institutional independence with academic integration. However, a critical modification is included in the General Scheme to

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[13] The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) was also a partner with DkIT and QUB on this project.

[14] Breath Of Fresh Air For Border Regions, May 2022, DkIT

[15] See for example Stranmillis policies on appointments and equal opportunities; Employment Promotion Procedures and Dignity at Work Policy and Procedures

account for DkTUC being under Irish jurisdiction and subject to distinct legislation within that. As previously noted, DkTUC will be established as an autonomous HEI under Irish jurisdiction, retaining financial and executive independence, and remaining subject to Irish legislation regarding fiscal policy and public sector employee terms and conditions. Although DkTUC will be within QUBs academic governance, the Bill as proposed includes provisions ensuring this is not absolute, as it is with St. Mary's and Stranmillis colleges. Under Head 12 of the General Scheme, while QUB is the designated awarding body, and DkTUC retains its status as a designated awarding body, the academic board of DkTUC will report to the academic council of QUB, to ensure a unified academic framework (addressing curriculum design, assessment, academic governance and regulatory alignment) will be developed within the academic structures of QUB.

Subject to the commencement of the proposed Bill, all NFQ level 8, 9, and 10 qualifications will transition fully to QUB under the anticipated transition timelines as announced in May 2026[16]. New students enrolling on undergraduate honours and postgraduate taught programmes from September 2027 will formally register within the QUB framework and graduate with university degrees issued directly by QUB, while first-year PhD students enrolling from January 2027 will register for QUB awards. Crucially, by retaining is status as a designated awarding body in Ireland, DkTUC will still award qualifications within specific educational portfolios - qualifications at NFQ Level 6 (Higher Certificate) and Level 7 (Ordinary Bachelor) (Head 12 pp26) can still be processed through domestic channels, ensuring DkTUC can continue to provide an accessible portal for adult education, upskilling, and local further education articulation routes along the border corridor in addition to its redesignation to Technological University College.

Cross border student body profile and all-island mobility dynamics

One of the objectives of the partnership and the proposed legislation is to increase the North/South mobility of students through enhanced opportunities. The following section provides a general outline the profile of the student cohorts at both DkIT and QUB, the current North-South student mobility, drawing predominantly from Smyth & Darmody's 2023 ESRI report, and considers the proposals in the General Scheme regarding student mobility

Historically, cross-border student mobility has been low, being asymmetric and constrained by divergent administrative frameworks.[17] According to the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA)[18] latest figures, which cover the 2024/2025 academic year, 4,050 students

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[16] DkIT and Queen's University Belfast Advance Strategic Partnership Towards University College Status, 12 May 2026, DkIT

[17] See Crossborder (2023) Cross-border-student-mobility-update-paper.pdf and ESRI (Smyth & Darmody 2023) Student Mobility in Ireland And Northern Ireland

[18] About HESA | HESA

studying at HEIs in Northern Ireland come from Ireland[19], an increase of almost 700 students from the 2023/2024 academic year[20]. HESA figures also show a significant increase in Irish students studying at Northern Irish HEIs over the ten-year period from the 2014/2015 academic year, where only 2,345 students studying at Northern Irish HEI's came from Ireland[21]. Of the current cohort, QUB specifically reports over 25,000 current students, of which 1,751 come from Ireland. Cross-border student mobility in the other direction, according to the most recent HEA statistics[22], show that as of the 2024/2025 academic year, 1,585 students enrolled across HEIs in Ireland were domiciled in Northern Ireland prior to enrollment. Of these figures, of DkIT's overall student enrolment of 5,240, just over 4% (equating to 220 students) come from Northern Ireland[23].

Profile of DkIT

DkIT functions as the primary higher education anchor for the North Leinster-South Ulster region. The institution employs over 600 staff[24] and offers 265 different programmes of study[25]. As previously noted, the campus maintains a student population of over 5,200 students, enrolled across four schools.[26]

Student Cohort

The demographic and socioeconomic profile of the DkIT student body reflects regional accessibility, vocational integration, and equity of access. The majority of the student base originates from its immediate catchment area—predominantly Louth, Meath, Monaghan, and Cavan. In addition to standard degree-level student intake, DkIT supports a significant statutory craft apprenticeship block in conjunction with SOLAS, making it an essential driver of skilled trade infrastructure for the North-East corridor[27].

Of the 5,240 DkIT students, 4,715 of these are enrolled on undergraduate courses, and 525 on postgraduate courses. Students from Northern Ireland comprise 205 undergraduates, and 15

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[19] Where do HE students come from? | HESA

[20] ibid

[21] ibid

[22] Access Our Data Students | Statistics | Higher Education Authority, (see Student Demographics, Northern Ireland for the academic year 2024/2025)

[23] As per HEA key statistics 2024/2025 academic year - KFF25 Enrolment by Institution | Tableau Public

[24] See statement from Dr. Edel Healy - Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science debate, 09 July 2026

[25] Courses | DkIT – Dundalk Institute of Technology

[26] Comprised of the Schools of Business & Humanities; Engineering; Health & Science and Informatics & Creative Arts; DkIT Annual Report 2023-2024 - See pp17

[27] See Dundalk Local Area Plan 2024-2030 - Chapter 6 - Economy & Employment (pp.75)

postgraduates[28]. The following figures illustrate the distribution of the total DkIT student body across subject area and level of study. For interest, figures are also provided to illustrate the distribution of DkIT students from Northern Ireland across the same category. All figures are all taken from the HEA's statistics on the 2024/2025 academic year, as previously referenced.

[28] All figures cited from HEA statistics available at Key Facts & Figures | Statistics | Higher Education Authority – taken from the 2024/2025 academic year data

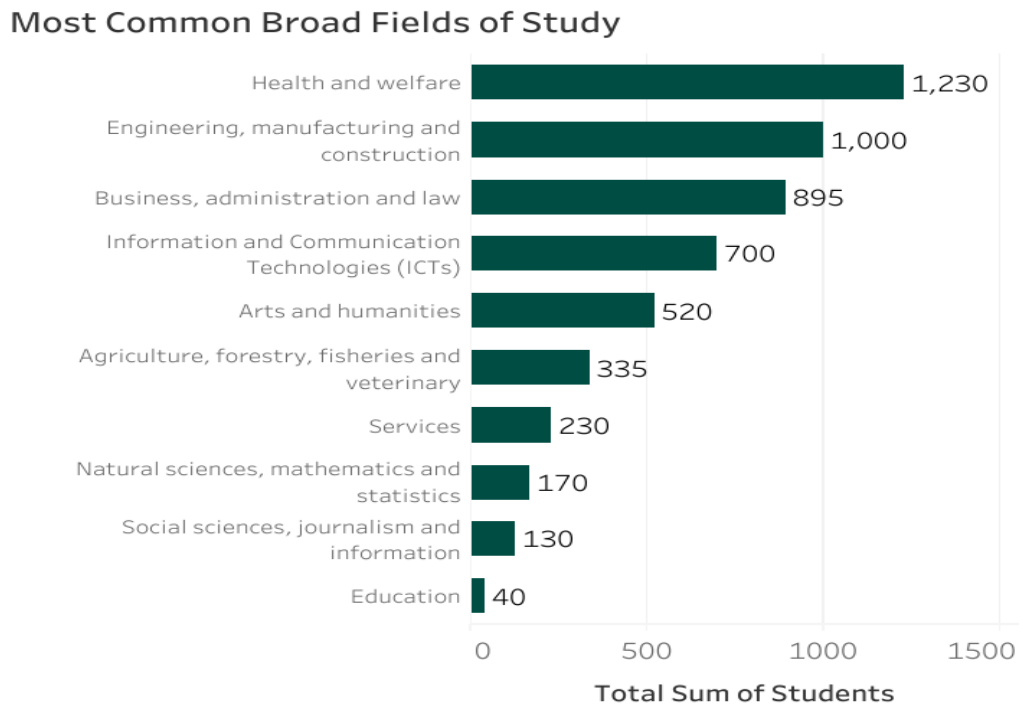

Figure 1 - DkIT student distribution by subject area 2024/2025

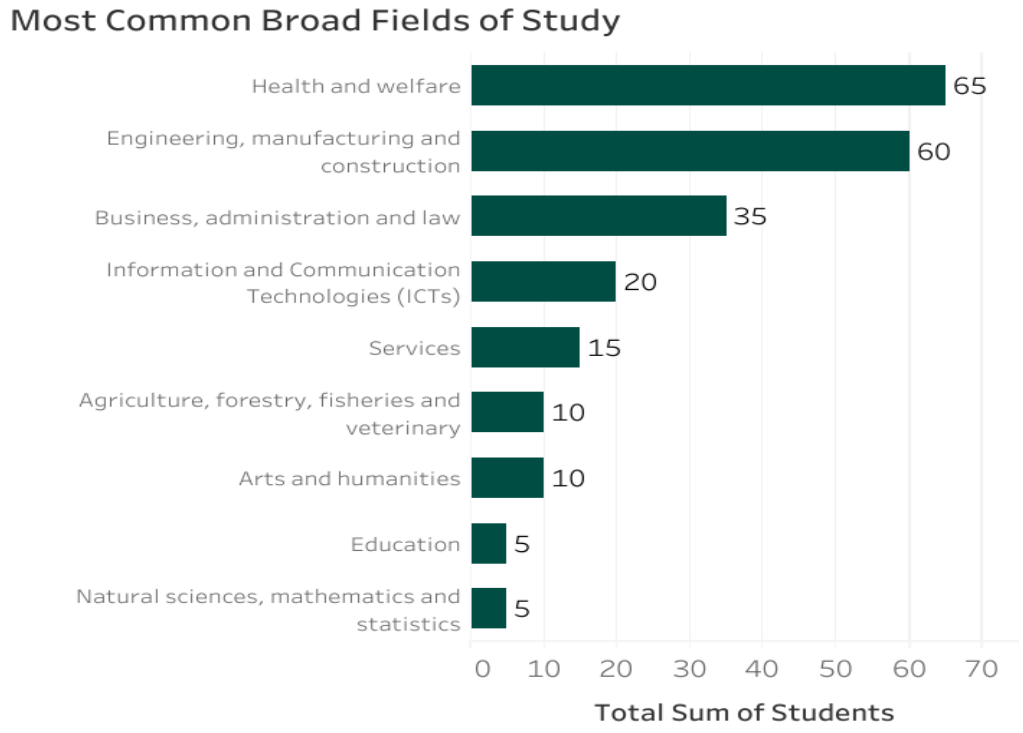

Figure 2 - Distribution of DkIT students from Northern Ireland by subject area 2024/2025

Profile of QUB

QUB is a research-intensive institution comprised of 17 schools across four faculties[29]. It employs over 4,000 staff[30] and offers over 760 courses[31]

Student Cohort

QUB had enrolment of over 25,000 students across four faculties during the 2024/2025 academic year, according to HESA statistics[32]. Of these, 18,210 were undergraduates and 6,870 were postgraduates with the majority (19,595) coming from the UK, including 17,635 coming from Northern Ireland.

Figure 3 below shows the distribution of students (all levels) across subject areas – HESA figures did not provide further breakdown of the subject areas studied by students coming from Ireland or Northern Ireland specifically.

[29] These are the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Ife Sciences; Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences; Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Queen's Business School

[30] Work at Queen's | Queen's University Belfast

[31] Queen's Coursefinder for UG, PG courses | Courses | Queen's University Belfast

[32] See - HE student enrolments by HE provider and subject of study2024/25 | HESA

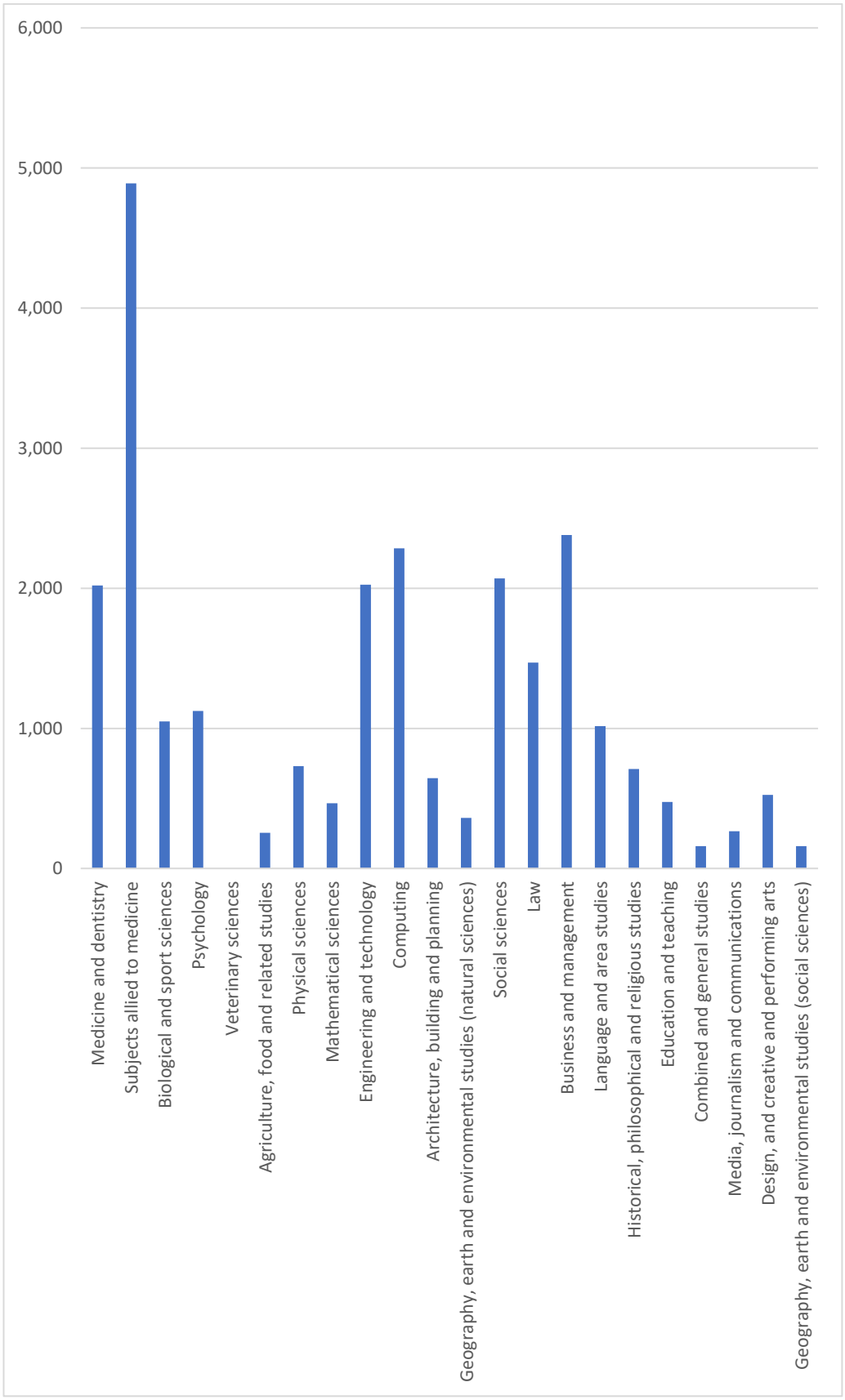

Figure 3 Distribution of QUB students by subject area 2024/2025

Systemic barriers to cross-border flow

This lack of cross-border mobility has been identified as being caused by distinct institutional and structural barriers operating within the two separate educational frameworks:

The CAO/A-Level asymmetry

The primary administrative barrier restricting Northern Irish students from applying to Irish HEIs is the Central Applications Office (CAO) points equivalence system for Northern Ireland's A-Level curriculum. To achieve the maximum CAO point allocations required for high-demand courses in Ireland, a student from Northern Ireland must sit four A-Level subjects – this is unusual as the majority of secondary schools only offer the option to undertake three A-Levels. This technical misalignment effectively locks out academically exceptional Northern students from competing equitably for places in Irish HEIs. For student mobility in the other direction, the lack of alignment between the timing of Leaving Certificate results and UCAS offers have been found to be a barrier to Irish students applying to and accepting places at Northern Irish HEIs[33]

Caps on university places and escalating costs

In Northern Ireland, a strict statutory cap on the number of domestic university places (MASN)[34] creates local competition and a shortage of university places, driving an annual outflow of Northern Irish students to England, Scotland and Wales (estimated at 13,600 students annually) rather than to Ireland, based on the ongoing student accommodation crisis and high cost of living. Meanwhile students from Ireland are deterred from undertaking third level study in Northern Ireland due to the differing financial supports available and higher fee structure.

Legislative proposal

Aims of the legislation

The primary aim of the proposed amending legislation is to facilitate the establishment of a cross-border/all-island partnership between DkIT and QUB, specifically providing for the transition of DkIT into a 'Technological University College, a college of Queen's University Belfast'. It is proposed that the partnership will be underpinned by shared academic provision, close collaboration in research and innovation, and the alignment of quality assurance

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[33] See Oireachtas - North South Student Enrolment in Tertiary Education, July 2022 Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science – Chapter 2 pp16-23

[34] Northern Ireland Assembly – Priority Questions AIMS Portal, 24 January 2013; Northern Ireland needs to prepare to educate, or prepare to fail, 06 May 2026, Irish Times; NI Education: Student number cap acts as 'economic handbrake', 08 November 2022, BBC News

standards. This legislative amendment will expand the landscape of Irish higher education to enable cross-border institutional integration and the alignment of quality assurance standards.

Under the partnership proposed in the legislation, as a college of QUB, DkTUC will deliver programmes validated by QUB, with awards conferred by QUB. However, it has also been reiterated as essential that the statutory academic autonomy of DkTUC is fully preserved, and that it continues to operate as a designated HEI under the Higher Education Authority Act 2022, including for the purposes of financial, staffing, and governance regulation and oversight.[35] Additionally, any designation of DkIT as a TUC must be awarded on the basis of demonstrated capacity to achieve the relevant university-level standards, assessed against clearly defined criteria, and within timeframes as specified in the proposed legislation.

The proposed legislation also aims to safeguard the coherence and integrity of the technological higher education sector as a whole, ensuring DkTUC remains a core institution in delivering technical and technological educations and qualifications. It also proposes provisions to safeguard against any future disruption caused by unintended or unforeseen divergence between the partner institutions, or a dissolution of the partnership, by containing proposed provisions allowing DkTUC to form a similar partnership with another institution should the QUB partnership cease at a future point.

[35] As per the Regulatory Impact Assessment (see pp 4&6) 07 May 2026. Also stated by DkIT and QUB in their formal announcements of the partnership on 19 November 2025 - "The partnership will see DkIT embedded within Queen's academic and quality assurance frameworks, ensuring students in Dundalk receive the same standard of education and award as those studying in Belfast. The Institute will retain its financial, staffing and governance autonomy, consistent with the collegiate model through which St. Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College operate in partnership with Queen's."

Key amendments in the General Scheme

The key provisions of the General Scheme as proposed can be grouped into three categories:

Key Amendments Proposed Under The General Scheme
1. Creation of a new category of Higher Education Institute (HEI) specifically for DkIT, the "Technological University College". The proposed legislation will establish a legal mechanism allowing a single standalone IT to apply for redesignation to a TUC, provided it enters into a formal, binding partnership agreement with an established university. To facilitate the partnership and allow DkIT to become DkTUC, a college of QUB, the proposed legislation will amend Technological Universities Act 2018 (The 2018 Act). The 2018 Act contained no provisions to redesignate individual ITs as TUs, rather it only permitted the designation of 'Technological University' to institutions through the amalgamation of multiple former Institutes of Technology. Many of these amendments will be technical in nature, for example inserting the term "or technological university college" into sections of the 2018 Act (as per Head 2 of the General Scheme)
2. Establishment of the First All-Island University Group The establishment of the first all-island/cross-border HEI is anticipated to foster deeper North-South economic and educational alignment along the critical Dublin-Belfast corridor. This anticipated alignment explicitly aligns with the Shared Island initiative, creating an integrated regional cross-jurisdiction Higher Education hub. The General Scheme proposes that the Bill legally validate the Heads of Agreement signed between Dundalk and Queen's in March 2026.
3. Retaining DkTUC's Autonomy – Separation of Governance and Funding from Academic Governance The proposed legislation creates a legal framework wherein DkTUC will retain its autonomy as an Irish HEI, subject to the funding and governance oversight provided for by the Higher Education Authority Act 2022, but will transfer its primary academic governance to QUB. From the academic year 2027/2028, students enrolling on and undertaking DkTUC programmes at NFQ Levels 8, 9 or 10 (undergraduate, master's and PhD qualifications) will receive their awards from QUB, while qualifications at NFQ Levels 6 and 7 will be awarded by DkTUC, despite both HEIs being designated awarding bodies.

The following section outlines how the General Scheme as published provides for the key objectives of the proposed legislation. As noted, this is not an exhaustive analysis of each Head of the General Scheme, but instead notes which Heads provide for the key objectives of the proposed amending legislation. This includes technical amendments providing for the functioning of the DkTUC and QUB partnership beyond the transfer of academic awards and standards to QUB, the structure, as proposed, of DkIT's retention of autonomy over its executive and financial governance, an overview of the proposed provisions regarding DkTUC staff, and notes on provisions relevant to student affairs.

The majority of the proposed heads in the General Scheme provide for technical amendments to the 2018 Act and other relevant Acts, inserting "or a technological university college" alongside "technological university", as the majority of functions of the new DkTUC will operate as per a Technological University. However, regarding public finance and public sector employment frameworks, the General Scheme as published provides that the dissolution of DkIT and the creation of DkTUC as a 'college of Queen's University Belfast' does not result in any transfer of governance of finances, assets or employees to an external jurisdiction (Northern Ireland). Under the initial amending provisions of the General Scheme, a new application and transformation pathway is inserted into the 2018 Act. Upon the completion of the required statutory process (and with the formal agreement of the Minister) DkIT will be dissolved. However, the creation of DkTUC as proposed is explicitly designated as an autonomous institution, providing for all functions of a technological university, including operational, and financial governance under Irish jurisdiction as per the 2018 Act, are transferred to DkTUC as a 'technological university college'. The General Scheme also proposes that DkTUC is designated as a HEI, under the Higher Education Authority Act 2022. This ensures that the institution remains within the direct funding remit of the HEA, receiving its core funding from the Irish exchequer.

The proposed heads of the Bill which introduce new provisions are largely concerned with the academic operations, particularly the quality assurance and designation of the awarding body for DkTUC qualifications, proposing to amend the 2018 Act to provide for a single institution (DkTUC) to appoint a partner university as its exclusive academic qualification awarding body. Under the proposed provisions, all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes delivered on the DkTUC campus (NFQ levels 8-10) will lead directly to qualifications conferred by QUB. To avoid any issues regarding academic standards or regulations across curriculums and awards, and any conflict between the QQI and the QAA, the General Scheme proposes a shared quality assurance and curriculum design managed through a unified framework.

Transfer of functions under the proposed legislation

To allow for the required dual operational jurisdictions, the General Scheme proposes to separate DkTUC's executive and financial oversight from its academic alignment. Head 38 of the proposed Bill designates DkTUC as a HEI, under the remit of the Higher Education Authority Act 2022, while Heads 25, 45, and 46 transfer the institutions current autonomy

over finances, and executive governance to DkTUC. This means that DkTUC will remain a direct recipient of HEA funding and remain subject to statutory regulation under the 2022 Act.

While student areas such as admissions, and health and wellbeing (under, under proposed Heads 37 and 25 respectively) will remain administered by DkTUC as an independent HEI, academic standards and qualifications will be overseen and awarded by QUB. As QUB and DkTUC are in different jurisdictions they are subject to different regulatory bodies with responsibility for oversight of academic standards and qualifications. Allowing for a HEI from a different jurisdiction to award qualifications is one of the key issues the proposed Bill must provide for to avoid potential regulatory conflict between Ireland's QQI and Northern Ireland's QAA. To do so, the General Scheme proposes a shared framework of quality assurance and programme approval, as agreed between the two institutions, with QUB designated as the awarding body for qualifications at undergraduate degree level and above. The proposed legislation also draws on existing cross-border qualification agreements and frameworks such as the Qualifications can Cross Boundaries framework, which maps Irish and UK qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework. Both the QQI and the QAA are members of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). They have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with regard to cross-border cooperation, comparability and quality assurance of academic standards and awards, which will ensure that the QUB awards issued to DkTUC students are automatically recognised at Levels 8, 9, and 10 on the NFQ.

Statutory autonomy and cross-border integration

A core objective to be addressed by the General Scheme is the creation of a structural arrangement bridging two distinct legal jurisdictions. As the DkTUC-QUB partnership is distinct from the merger model provided for in the 2018 Act, which mandated a multi-campus amalgamation of institutions within one jurisdiction, designated as 'Technological Universities', the proposed amending legislation introduces a new designation (the Technological University College) into the Irish HE landscape.

The Bill as proposed in the General Scheme, establishes a dual-identity mechanism for DkTUC, which will remain legally, financially, and operationally an autonomous HEI under Irish jurisdiction, also retaining its status as a designated awarding body, while academically integrating into the framework of QUB.

Technical Amendments

Under the General Scheme as published, the establishment of DkTUC as a college of QUB introduces operational, structural, and cross-border changes beyond the validation of academic awards. These changes include:

1. Cross-Border Governance

- Due to the transfer of academic governance to QUB, under Heads 9 & 10 QUB will have limited direct governance influence in DkTUC. Once established, the governing body of the newly formed DkTUC must replace two of the ordinary external members of the DkIT governing body, with two external members nominated directly by QUB. These nominees must be integrated into the transitional governing body within six months of the establishment day.
- Additionally, a structural entity, the Academic Board will be created to function alongside the existing Academic Council. The regulations provided for under Head 11 of the General Scheme mandate that at least one member of the senior academic staff at QUB must sit on this Academic board to oversee the alignment of the academic frameworks between the two institutions.
- Under provisions proposed in Heads 8 and 11, the governing body of DkTUC must also provide for and maintain a quality assurance system that is explicitly approved by QUB, in order for DkTUC to align directly with QUB's institutional quality systems.

2. Mandatory Cross-Border Research and Innovation Remit

Under Head 7 of the General Scheme, the proposed legislation includes a comprehensive cross-border research and innovation mandate, requiring DkIT to, under the partnership:

- Jointly operate physical research infrastructure, including the operationalization of joint research centres, shared laboratories, and national-level research infrastructure.
- Coordinate research programmes in agreed priority areas and submit collaborative funding applications.
- Drive shared innovation, enterprise, and commercialisation activities, specifically targeting spin-outs, start-ups, and industry-academic partnerships.

3. Institutional Strategic Alignment

- Under Head 13 of the General Scheme, the President of DkTUC will be required to consult with QUB when preparing the institution's Strategic Development Plan. The plan must explicitly outline how the college will engage with QUB to contribute to cross-border economic strategies, enterprise growth, and regional investment.
- Head 14 provides that the President must also consult with QUB when preparing the institution's official Equality Statement.

4. Cross-Border Staff and Student Mobility

The General Scheme also provides for the creation of formal, shared initiatives to support cross-border movement under Heads 7 and 16, including:

- Provision of structured opportunities for staff exchanges, joint professional development, and shared training initiatives.

- Enhanced student mobility programs, explicitly including cross-border placements, summer schools, short-term exchanges, and experiential learning opportunities.

5. Institutional Data Exchange

Head 26 of the General Scheme proposes specific legal provision allowing DkTUC to share both personal and non-personal student data with QUB.

DkTUC: Retention of autonomy

Despite the partnership arrangement and the designation of DkTUC as 'a college of Queens University Belfast', the General Scheme provides for DkTUC to operate as an autonomous HEI under the proposed amending legislation.

Under Head 38, immediately upon establishment of the new institution, DkTUC will be designated as an institution of higher education, under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Act 2022. This ensures its primary oversight, funding, and reporting obligations remain under Irish jurisdiction. DkTUC will also be established as a designated awarding body, meaning it will have the ability to award qualifications at all levels. Under the proposed provisions of Heads 2 and 7, DkTUC's Academic Council remains fully operational, with full autonomous oversight of the quality and standards of any programmes where DkTUC chooses to exercise its own statutory awarding powers. Further to these provisions, Head 8 as proposed by the General Scheme explicitly tasks DkTUC's governing body with providing "governance and oversight of the financial affairs of the technological university college to ensure value for money and its financial viability", ensuring full autonomy from QUB over its assets and budget.

Cessation of the Partnership

The General Scheme proposes that the amending legislation provide for a clear process should the partnership between DkTUC and QUB require to be dissolved. Head 27 of the General Scheme as published provides a mechanism specifically for the "Dissolution of Strategic Partnership Agreement". If the partnership with QUB is dissolved, these provisions as proposed allow for DkTUC to remain an independent HEI, or, to form a new strategic partnership with an alternative university – under the provisions of Heads 2 and 16, any new partnership institution must be a university within Ireland. Should the specific partnership with QUB dissolve, Head 9 provides that the QUB members appointed to the DkTUC governing body are simply removed and replaced by members appointed by the new partner institution.

Staffing provisions

The explicit provisions contained in the General Scheme regarding staff relate to institutional governance, alignment, and academic standards. Head 16 for example, proposes extensive specific provisions for academic staffing requirements, dictating that at least 90% of full-time academic staff teaching on degree programmes must hold a master's or doctoral degree, and outlines a 10-year capacity plan to increase the doctoral ratio to at least 65%. Further to this

Head 9 guarantees specific staff seats on the new governing body, while Head 35 ensures that any ongoing disciplinary or suspension procedures initiated under DkIT will transfer to DkTUC.

The General Scheme as published does not explicitly refer to staff employment, contracts, and terms and conditions including pension provisions. Nonetheless the continuity of staff employment is provided for through the structural transfer of institutional functions and powers provided for under the proposed legislation.

Under Head 25 of the General Scheme, all functions of DkIT will be transferred to the newly established DkTUC on the appointed day. As the statutory functions of an Institute of Technology under current legislation (specifically Section 11 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, as amended by the Institutes of Technology Act 2006) explicitly encompass the power to appoint staff, select officers, and manage employee terms, conditions, and remuneration, these ongoing functions automatically transfer to DkTUC. Section 11(1)(a) explicitly provides for a college to appoint such and so many persons to be its officers and servants as it thinks proper, subject to the approval of the Minister and the Minister for Public Expenditure. Section 11(1)(b) directly mandates that the "selection of such officers and servants shall be a function of the college", while Sections 11(2) and 11(6) provide that the college holds the function of determining and managing the terms, conditions, remuneration, and allowances of its staff (subject to ministerial approval and oversight).

With regard to contracted staff Section 11(4) of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, (as amended by the Institutes of Technology Act 2006), provides that the college has the specific function to appoint suitable persons to research fellowships, assistantships, and other support posts on a temporary, part-time, or contract basis.

Issues relevant to students

Although receiving their qualifications from QUB, students enrolling at DkTUC will legally be registered students of an autonomous HEI, where admissions and student affairs including wellbeing and financial resources available, will remain entirely governed and provided by DkTUC. Head 7 of the proposed legislation includes provisions for facilitating both staff and student mobility in both directions, however this does not dictate what that includes or how it will be practiced. However, announcements and discussion regarding the Heads of the Agreement as signed by DkIT and QUB, and the collegiate model under which St. Mary's and Stranmillis operate as colleges of QUB indicate that DkTUC students enrolled on programmes awarding QUB qualification would be afforded benefits such as library access, access to academic networks, and participation in specified extra-curricular activities. Conversely, core teaching, and student support remain embedded to DkTUC.

As student status would remain based at DkTUC, with dual enrollment not proposed under the General Scheme or the institutional signed agreement, the amending legislation would have no impact on general student funding and grants access, such as SUSI grants. These would remain subject to the same eligibility criteria for students enrolling on DkTUC as currently apply to those enrolling at DkIT. Students enrolling on courses at DkTUC whether Irish or

Northern Irish, retain full access to SUSI maintenance and fee grants under standard eligibility rules[36].

Conclusion

This briefing paper has considered policy and legislative context of the General Scheme of the Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026, as proposed to provide for the planned strategic partnership between DkIT and QUB. The Bill is anticipated to establish Ireland's first all-island HEI, under the designation of DkTUC, a college of QUB. A core feature of the General Scheme is its separation of academic integration from executive, financial, and operational governance. By separating these functions, the General Scheme aims to navigate the complexities of operating across two jurisdictions. Under the provisions of the General Scheme, QUB will be is designated as the awarding body for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, while DkTUC retains full institutional autonomy under Irish law, crucially remaining a designated HEI under the Higher Education Authority Act 2022, ensuring direct exchequer funding, continued accountability to the Irish Regulatory bodies, and the preservation of domestic public sector employment and pension frameworks. Furthermore, by retaining its independent awarding powers for sub-degree provisions (NFQ Levels 6 and 7), DkTUC will be able to safeguard its position as a provider of regional adult further education, technical apprenticeship blocks, and vital further education articulation routes. From a mobility and operational perspective, the partnership via the proposed legislation, also targets long-standing systemic barriers that have historically impeded cross-border integration. By establishing formal mechanisms for joint research infrastructure, institutional data exchange, and structured student and staff mobility, the Bill facilitates functional all-island operational alignment. Importantly, the General Scheme will provide necessary legislative continuity for existing staff and students of DkIT, through the statutory transfer of institutional functions.

[36] As per Eligibility Criteria | SUSI