



Waterford Institute *of* Technology
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

Observations and Proposals from
Waterford Institute of Technology

on the

Proposed
Material Amendments to the Draft Regional
Spatial and Economic Strategy for the
Southern Region

11 October 2019

General Remarks

1. Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) welcomes the publication of the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region and welcomes the opportunity to comment on these proposals.
2. The Institute made a comprehensive and detailed submission to the initial consultation (8 March 2019). While acknowledging the complexity of the process by which the final RSES is to be agreed, and while acknowledging the challenges of balancing the proposals made by a very wide variety of interested parties, it is disappointing to note that of the thirty seven detailed recommendations made by the Institute as part of the initial consultation, only one relatively minor recommendation has been adopted. In particular, the Institute is disturbed that not a single one of its recommendations relating to the proposed Technological University of the South East (TUSE) has been included: it would have been expected that a higher education institution involved in building the TUSE would have some impact on how higher education and the TUSE is described.

Technological University of the South East

3. The lack of a well-defined articulation of the role and impact of the TUSE on the region is a serious deficiency in the draft RSES. If adopted in this form, without a substantial and clear description of an enhanced higher education proposition in and for the region, the RSES will seriously undermine the ability of the South East to deliver any of its plans for economic, social and cultural development and will compromise future higher education provision in the region and throughout the South.
4. We note the recommendation in the Director's Report that "Additional text will be provided to strengthen the section and objective on TUSE and address some of the issues raised around infrastructural requirements" (p.248) and it is WIT's view that our proposed amendments to the original draft should, as a minimum, inform—and indeed could largely constitute—the text requested by the Director to correct the paucity of the existing document with regard to one of the most critical developments in the region's history. For reference, these recommendations are summarized and attached below. Determining infrastructural requirements without first understanding and clarifying the vision of the entity would be premature and very damaging to the future organization and its effectiveness.

Cities and Key Towns

5. In its original submission, WIT noted the necessity for clarity in the definition of the relationship between cities, key towns, and rural areas. The material amendments go some way to defining that relationship but further clarity is needed. It is important that the key principles of the National Planning Framework are maintained in any re-articulation of the relationship and that the RSES is not seen to resile on the strategic imperative that the South East region generates an urban centre of scale to drive economic development and to host critical services such as acute healthcare, retail, tourism, culture, and higher and specialist education. "As the largest centres of population, employment and services outside the Capital", *Project 2040* declares, "the four cities other than Dublin, provide a focus for their regions." The primacy of the cities—Waterford, Cork, Limerick in the Southern region—as focal points for regional growth must remain at the core of the RSES; requiring elaboration is the precise relationship (the "repositioning" proposed in Material Amendment 3) between these

primary growth centres and the “self-sustaining regional drivers” of the Key Towns. In this regard, new RPO A (Material Amendment 3) and Material Amendment 7 are somewhat contradictory.

Waterford MASP

6. WIT restates its proposal that consideration is given to extending the Waterford MASP boundary. The proposed extension to the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area is noted; a similar extension should be considered for Waterford. As indicated in our original response, we propose that for the purposes of the MASP the Assembly extends the boundaries of the Waterford Metropolitan Area to encompass settlements within short commuting distance of the city (for instance, Tramore, Mooncoin, Dunmore East, New Ross), taking a spatial approach rather than a historical-political boundary-based approach to determining the Waterford city sphere of influence. All demographic, employment, economic and other projections should be subsequently scaled up in the document.

Climate Change

7. WIT welcomes the strengthening of the RSES in support of measures to counteract climate change.

Observations on Selected Material Amendments

Material Amendment 3:

8. As indicated above, clarity is required on what is meant by the proposal to “re-position” towns and villages in relation to cities. The Institute proposes the following:

New RPO A: Planning for Diverse Areas

The RSES recognises the strategic role played by all areas, urban and rural, in achieving the targets and objectives of the NPF and RSES. Support for sustainable growth of all communities, urban and rural, are supported by the RSES. A strategy is pursued that builds on cities and metropolitan areas as engines of growth and ~~seeks in parallel to re-position~~ that draws on the region’s strong network of towns, villages and diverse rural areas in an economically resilient, imaginative and smart manner to create a sustainable competitive advantage for the region.

Material Amendment 6, 7 and 8

9. WIT notes the following with regard to these amendments:
 - (i) The recognition of the differing scales of the key towns is to be welcomed though the rationale for differentiation in the typology unclear—it would seem to be based on population with larger towns having a population in excess of 17,000. In the original draft RSES, table 3.3, certain other criteria are proposed: County Town; Significant Zone of Influence; Interregional Role; Sub-regional Role. These might form the basis of a more robust and nuanced articulation of the differences between certain Key Towns and others.
 - (ii) Requiring further clarification is the relationship between “self-sustaining regional drivers” and the regional cities as the primary engines of growth as indicated above.

- (iii) The suggestion (Amendment 7) that it is a matter for the Local Authorities to determine the “nature, scale and phasing of [the] growth” of the larger key towns would seem to be at variance with an overall region-based approach to the management of growth. The integration of growth strategies across the region is critical to delivering on the goals of *Project 2040*.
- (iv) The declaration of support for education and training in Material Amendment 8 (g) is welcome but we propose the following wording:

g. It is an objective to support learning, education and training ~~initiatives~~, economic regeneration ~~initiatives~~, **research and innovation**, and enterprise **activation initiatives** ~~facilities to address unemployment blackspots~~ **as vehicles for economic growth, the creation of new employment opportunities, the cultivation of talent within and the attraction of talent to the region, and as a vital contributor to quality of life for communities.**

Material Amendment 15 and 17

10. WIT notes the following regarding these amendments:

- (i) The specificity of the recommendation regarding the development of particular physical sites for the TUSE (15. (d) and 17.(e)) is inconsistent with the approach recommended by the Director in his report: “In relation to other questions raised [...] on requirements for land and buildings [for the TUSE], it would be premature for the RSES/MASP to set out specific requirements for these when the higher education entity that is TUSE has yet to be formally established” (p.248).
- (ii) It is unnecessary to refer repeatedly to the “Multi-Campus TUSE”; “the TUSE” suffices. (WIT, in common with many if not most higher education institutions in Ireland, currently operates over multiple campuses but does not need to refer to itself as “Multi-Campus WIT”.) We suggest the entire document is revised to remove this superfluous term.

Material Amendment 18

11. It would be appropriate to reference higher education here, consistent with the references to higher education in all the other larger Key Towns. We propose the following:

g. It is an objective to continue to realize the potential economic benefits of higher education activity in Clonmel and to support existing higher education providers—noting also the potential collaboration with the future TUSE—in further enhancing the impact of higher education on the town and wider region.

Material Amendment 19

12. While noting that the role of Dungarvan as a Gaeltacht Service Town remains part of the text (now in revised text (a)), there is merit in retaining (c) as a means to highlight the importance of the Gaeltacht to the South East.

Material Amendment 36

13. The specificity of the new text here is unnecessary. We suggest the following:

The RSES ~~seeks~~ encourages close interaction between the ~~HEI sector and centres of Research and Development including MAREI and the National Maritime College~~ higher education (especially high-performing research centres), State agencies, and enterprise to position the region in as a leader in this field.

Material Amendment 54

14. We restate our proposed wording for a revision of RPO131 as more logical and accurate:

Optimise high quality high capacity international digital transmission connections between the Region, US, UK and Europe through support for regional Internet Exchange facilities in Waterford and Limerick and associated large scale regional data centres to connect more fully with the Hibernia Express subsea cable line located at Cork Internet Exchange and the Ireland-France Subsea Cable.

Material Amendment 84

15. We welcome the inclusion of the proposed text.

Material Amendment 85

16. We refer to our comments on Material Amendments 15 and 17 above with regard to specific commitments to certain locations.

Material Amendment 87

17. This amendment presents a very confusing picture and should be altered. We propose the following:

RPO 181: ~~Higher Education and Further Education and Training (FET)~~

It is an objective to increase the investment in addressing our region's skills needs through investment in the Higher Education (HE) and Further Education and Training (FET) sectors and Research, recognising:

(a): The strong partnerships already evident between FET, HE and agencies such as the Regional Skills Forum in addressing regional is a lead contact point for citizens to re-engage with learning and support investment in Development and Innovation capacity, and the initiatives of the Regional Skills Fora and Lifelong Learning and

(b): The important role of the Education and Training Boards in the further education sector, creating a diversity of skills,

education, lifelong learning and enabling access to job opportunities for citizens is recognised. It is an objective to support investment in ETB facilities and initiatives.

(c): The critical role of HE in the continued evolution of the regional effort to identify and address skills gaps, retraining needs, continuing professional development needs, and the future needs for a sustainable, knowledge driven economy.

Material Amendment 135:

18. We restate our proposal that Waterford MASP Policy Objective 2 includes the following text:

f. It is an objective also to improve the digital connectivity of the city to the wider region and internationally through connection to the Ireland-France undersea cable and other transmission points.

Material Amendment 137

19. It would be appropriate to make reference to the Waterford Cultural Quarter in this text.

WIT Proposals on the TUSE

The following are some of the various recommendations made by WIT as part of the initial consultation that describe the TUSE and its likely impact on the region. It is critical, in our view, that a detailed and compelling vision for the TUSE is presented as part of the RSES.

Reference (Section, page number in original Draft RSES)	Proposed Text
<p>1.3, p.16: An additional section on education should be added to the Regional Profile chapter, it is suggested after the section on “Agency supported employment”</p>	<p>EDUCATION</p> <p>The Southern Region currently is home to two of the State’s universities (UCC and UL) and five Institutes of Technology (IT Carlow, Limerick IT, Cork IT, Waterford IT, IT Tralee).</p> <p>Approximately one third of full-time students in higher education in the State attend college in the Southern Region, that is, over 50,000 full-time students currently (2017-18 enrolments). About 90% of these students are from within the region. The majority of college-going students from within the region go to a university or an Institute of Technology within the Southern Region. There is considerable variability across the Region however, with significant numbers of college-going students from the South East (about 40%) studying outside the South East, whereas Cork and Limerick-based college-going populations tend to study within Cork and Limerick.</p> <p>The regional Institutes are currently merging to form two additional universities, the Munster Technological University and the Technological University of the South East. These new universities will considerably enhance the range of educational provision and will greatly contribute to the innovation and research landscape, allowing for the creation of greater critical mass within areas of specialisation and allowing for greater international visibility of the regional educational proposition. In the case of the TUSEI it is envisaged that the creation of a university will contribute to retaining more students within the South East as well as attracting more students from outside the region.</p>
<p>Add a new section (between current 4.4 and 4.5 (p.87):</p>	<p>A LEARNING REGION</p> <p>Critical to the future development of the Southern Region as an innovation-centred region is positioning itself as a Learning Region.</p> <p>In the first instance, the Southern Region in describing itself as a Learning Region will commit to placing learning and innovation at the centre of its future development plans. This commitment will require not just a fostering of the appropriate learning infrastructure but also adopting innovative practices within all regional institutions</p>

	<p>and across all businesses and industries thus creating “learning organisations” that are driven by innovation at their core.</p> <p>The Learning Region ultimately involves a reorientation of the region’s key actors to create structures and processes in support of focussed knowledge-intensive collaboration to address the region’s needs and drive development. It involves government (national, local and European), academic institutions, and industry working together in partnership towards mutually beneficial and clearly defined regional development ends founded in knowledge co-creation, transfer, exchanges and sharing.</p> <p>Since 2016, the Regional Skills Fora have provided a cohesive education-led structure for employers and the further and higher education system to work together in building responses to the skills needs of the Region and as part of the Network of Regional Skills Fora created as part of the Government’s National Skills Strategy allowing employers and the education and training system to work together to meet current and emerging skills needs. These entities need to be greatly enhanced if the region is to be truly a Learning Region. This means evolving further structures to facilitate more dynamic and flexible relationships between industry, academia, citizens (and social partners) and State agencies.</p> <p>At the heart of the educational infrastructure in the Learning Region will be an engaged, ambitious and proactive higher education system. The addition of two new regional Technological Universities of international standing that will drive sustainable regional economic and social development will greatly enhance the capability of the Southern Region. These entities will have primary responsibility for foregrounding innovation both in their own practices and in supporting the development of such practices with others. These institutions will contribute ultimately to the creation of a pervasive learning culture across the region.</p>
<p>An additional section in Chapter 4, after 4.8 (p.105) that focusses on the role of higher education in promoting innovation.</p>	<p>HIGHER EDUCATION, ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION</p> <p>The EU’s Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World policy states that “Innovation can no longer be seen as the result of predefined and isolated innovation activities but rather as the outcome of a complex co-creation process involving knowledge flows across the entire economic and social environment.” Consistent with this policy, research activity in higher education institutions, and within the open innovation ecosystem of which these institutions necessarily are part, increasingly involves the co-creation and co-production of new knowledge in a manner that values and systematically enables collaboration. This new knowledge is highly impactful and a driver of economic growth.</p> <p>The Southern Region has seven major higher education institutions, four of which are currently being re-designated as Technological Universities (Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tralee will form the Munster Technological University, while Institute of Technology Carlow and Waterford Institute of</p>

Technology will form the Technological University of the South East). These new universities in particular will have a leading role in the SPA in encouraging innovation and the application, including the commercial application, of all forms of intellectual property. Their role in this respect is strongly supported by the RSES as a vital part of the overall regional proposition. Building on existing strengths in the region the new universities will increase the region's human capital and enhance the ongoing economic development of the region. The new universities in particular therefore will:

- act as a focal point for leadership, innovation and policy direction, and therefore as a force of cohesion within the various regions of the SPA;
- create and implement a continuous evolving process of seamless interaction of learning, creativity and innovation between government agencies, industry and society;
- be a catalyst in developing an inclusive, collaborative, cooperative environment whereby academics, researchers, public servants, private sector employees and graduates co-create, co-design and co-implement products, processes and procedures to meet societal needs;
- facilitate an innovation process of co-creation, co-design and co-implementation between government, research organization, education institutions and public sector organizations that strengthens the sustainable economic development of the region;
- generate and support visionaries and leaders to work in and with public and private sector organizations and society in general;
- support the provision of an innovation platform that attract talent into the region – scientists, inventors, researchers, innovators, highly skilled professionals, leading academics, as well as highly skilled public administrators;
- Facilitate the process of developing the Southern Region as a Learning Region.

In common with existing universities, the new Technological Universities will be expected to contribute to the achievement of Ireland's national research and innovation objectives as well as to European research aspirations. The policy expectations of all research engaged institutions, such as universities, as expressed in both national and EU strategies involves:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining an outward-facing, open and collaborative approach to research and innovation, collaborating with public and private partners (regional, national and international) at all stages in the research cycle; • Identifying and prioritizing domains of critical mass and international excellence, tied where appropriate to local, regional and national specialism, to ensure maximum research and innovation impact; • Utilizing research to build the economy, promote social progress and citizen access; • Developing international collaboration by promoting researcher mobility, the creation of more open platforms to facilitate the circulation and transfer of knowledge, with widening participation in key International Research Organizations (IROs) and greater integration with the European Research Area (ERA); • Developing more structured, robust and focused graduate programmes tied to overall research prioritization. <p>Investment in research infrastructure in support of these new universities as well as continued investment in existing infrastructure is critical if the ambitions of the region are to be realised.</p>
<p>We suggest that the fourth paragraph in section 7.1.5 (p.171) is revised as follows:</p>	<p>The region has a number of leading higher education institutions with strong enrolment from within the regional population, though the level of enrolment varies across the region with lower levels of progression to regional higher education providers evident in the South East in particular. It is a regional priority to retain more talent within the region and to enhance the attractiveness of higher education to arrest outward migration and encourage significantly greater numbers of people to study and subsequently work and live in the region. The regional proposition is considerably strengthened by the provision of enhanced higher education offerings that are recognised nationally and internationally (through, for instance, global rankings) with those offered in Dublin. Access to high quality higher education locally and regionally enhances the quality of life of all the region’s citizens and facilitates greater levels of third level attainment. It is notable that while the region has good rates of access to third level education at 30% it trails the 33% State and the 37% EMRA averages. The RSES explicitly supports the establishment of the Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) and the Munster Technological University (MTU) which will greatly enhance the quality of regional higher education and will enhance the ability of higher education provision to drive regional development.</p>

<p>Section 7.1.9 (p.174):</p>	<p>As indicated in Chapter 4 the regional economy requires a consistent supply of highly skilled, resilient, educated personnel and an extensive and adaptable talent pool to drive future enterprise development.</p> <p>There are immediate challenges to address short-term skills needs in support of current economic development. Already established within the region are three Regional Skill Managers and Fora which align with SPA areas of the Mid-West, South-East and South-West. The Regional Skills Fora have established strong relationships with employers and education providers to become an effective means of facilitating timely, co-ordinated responses to industry skills needs at regional level and to ensuring the optimum local alignment between education and training provision and local industry skills needs. They are central in improving and enhancing the talent proposition and it is essential they become a permanent part of the education and training infrastructure.</p> <p>The innovation-based economy requires ongoing upskilling and talent development. The creation of two new universities within the region in the form of two Technological Universities will address gaps in current regional higher education provision, will arrest the outward migration of talent from the region through offering greater access to high quality university education locally, as well as strengthening the region's innovation capacity and capability. In supporting the creation of these two new universities, and the talent that these new universities will cultivate and attract, the RSES is supporting the enhancement of the region's ability to function at the cutting edge of technological change and to position itself internationally as an innovation-led region.</p> <p>The new universities will form a critical part of a network of education providers greatly enhancing access to education across the region, particularly in lifelong learning. The National Skills Strategy identifies that increasing people's lifelong learning, especially of those in employment, is a national performance gap. Lifelong learning participation rate for 2014 was 7% compared to an EU average of 11%. There are also lower participation rates among those in employment at 6% compared to the EU average of 12%. The Strategy recognises that Lifelong Learning and access to a variety of learning opportunities beyond school, is increasingly important.</p>
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WIT proposes the following additional material for the Waterford MASP.	
Waterford MASP Reference	Proposed Text
section 6.1 (p.293):	<p>Section 6.1 Technological University of the South East (TUSE)</p> <p>The creation of the Technological University of the South-East (TUSE) will harness the excellence of education resources, research and innovation, industry, social and community engagement in WIT and IT Carlow and develop a new university for the city of Waterford and the wider South East that will be a catalyst for social, cultural and economic change.</p> <p>The MASP supports the development of TUSE as an enhancement of existing higher education options in the region, along with the increased recognition a University will bring to the Waterford City Region which will allow Waterford to be recognised as a University City. The direct benefits of the development of TUSE will coincide with the wider objectives of the MASP to transform and grow the Waterford Metropolitan Area through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced innovation capability in the region through considerably enhanced research and innovation infrastructure in support of the regional strategy to build knowledge-intensive industry and sustainable and high-quality employment; • Improved capability to deliver the talent pipeline to regional industry and enterprise; • An improvement in the ability of the South East to retain existing talent and to attract new talent from overseas; • Greater range and volume of cultural activity which is normally associated with a University City; • Greater access to finance to fund infrastructural development on campus sites in the city; • Greater accessibility of higher education opportunities across the city and region. <p>As a priority development for the city and region, it is recognised that the creation of TUSE will require co-operation of all public agencies to facilitate access to lands for campus expansion, additional housing</p>

	options to accommodate students, recreational lands and facilities and provide sustainable transport infrastructure including bus services to TUSE locations.
33b. Amend Waterford MASP Policy Objective 11: Technological University of the South East (p.294) as follows:	Regional Local Authorities and Public Bodies shall prioritise the development of the necessary infrastructure and connectivity (including research and innovation infrastructure) to support the creation of the TUSE and its future expansion as a critical element in the transformation and growth of the Waterford Metropolitan Area and the wider region, subject to the outcome of environmental assessments and the planning process.