
Ireland's first Technological University: A personal reflection

I write today, March 21st, designated UNESCO World Poetry Day – there are many poems and poetry collections that could capture and celebrate the arrival of a new University. On a personal note I have a sense of relief that the collective efforts of so many over the past few years have been realised and we now have an opportunity to breathe life into the bold ambition and vision buried within 117 sections, 7 parts and 2 schedules of the Technological Universities Act. My greatest fear has not been realised – not a might have been scenario as eloquently captured by John Greenleaf Whittier - 'For all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest of these, "It might have been"'.

The publication of the **National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030** (2011) (also known as the **Hunt Report**) represented a pivotal moment in the development of Irish higher education policy. It envisioned the establishment of a new type of university- a technological university offering career-based education from higher certificate to PhD as well as engagement in industry-focused research and innovation. This vision was realised on January 1st 2019 when **Technological University Dublin** officially came into being; an act that required the dissolution of three existing institutes of technology – Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology Tallaght - each with its own proud history and traditions that have influenced and shaped the educational journeys of generations of Irish citizens.

The **Hunt Report** recognised that our national asset is our people – and that access to and participation in all levels of education is critical to both the economic and social transformation of Irish society. Globally there is a 'war on talent' – with some 50% of the workforce holding a higher education qualification. All students have expectations of attending college, with a 30% projected growth in the numbers attending Higher Education by 2030. Although we are above the EU average in relation to overall participation levels, inequalities persist within key underrepresented groups. The response to the collapse of apprenticeships has focused attention on re-imagining the apprenticeship model and the introduction of new areas and traineeships.

The **Technological University** will embrace this changing landscape with an exciting and ambitious programme of work built around seven key thematic areas:

1. Academic Development and the New University Graduate

2. Student Experience and Wellness

3. Engaged International Institution

4. A Force for Innovation

5. 21st Century Workplace

6. Efficient Use of Resources

7. Digital Campus

However we all recognise that we must bring this experience of a Technological University to our learners by our ongoing commitment, connectedness and generosity. A sentiment described by Kathleen Fitzpatrick who advocates a reorientation of academe toward something more positive, more collaborative, alerting us to the current scenario that higher education is fractured by competition.

This competitive individualism – contradicts and in fact undermines all of the most important communal aspects of life within our institutions of higher education.” (Fitzpatrick 2019 p.27)

The real measure of our success is to continue to put the learner at the heart of our community. To build on the culture that recognises their unique abilities and their right to embark on an educational journey that will offer choice, support and an authentic experience independent of their background.

My own views on the arrival of Ireland’s first Technological University (TU) are offered in the poem below – ‘An bhfuil TÚ ag teacht’ – translated as ‘Are you coming?’ – an invitation to join us as the journey continues!

An bhfuil TÚ ag teacht?

Let’s re-imagine Education
The wise man Hunt has said
You might consider coherent frameworks
Innovative approaches all research led

But first we must embrace this change
Step up to the plate to bat
The rules of the game are changing
Our planet is demanding that

I hear that transformation
Is a new philosophy in town
Embraced by many visionaries
Not all are robed in gowns

You can fly to Porta Ventura
For fifteen euros I’m told
And have all your music streaming
From somewhere in the cloud

You can transact your banking business

From the comfort of your home
Communicate with distant relatives
Using apps on your slim iPhone

But when it comes to education
We like to state the fact
That the problem is our students
And we must plug their endless gaps?

Our programmes are quite perfect
It's these learners don't you see
In points they are quite paltry
And their motivation is all at sea

Our courses have been accredited
By august bodies far and near
They all agreed and begged to plead
Sure there is no need to change at all

For Hunt is just a notion
A passing fad that is sure to fade
Another weighty document
We can implement some other day

But hold on now a minute!
Is that resistance I hear?
You sound like someone running
Not prepared to face your fear

To accept that WE must do better
WE must do better than just accept
Not just a change that is reversible
A transformation with no way back

So, now is the time to be daring
To risk your whole-self to date
On something that is an inkling
A gut instinct, an emotional fate

For the education of our nation
Needs this emboldened dream
Which at its heart will seek to impart
A transformation that ALL can feel

References

Fitzpatrick K., [Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University](#), John Hopkins University Press, 2019.



Larry McNutt

Registrar, TU Dublin

[@larrymcn](#)

Larry is currently the Registrar and a member of the senior management team at TU Dublin – Blanchardstown Campus. Larry has over 35 years' experience in Higher Education both in Ireland and Australia with 15 years senior management experience as the Head of School of Informatics and Engineering at TU Dublin – Blanchardstown Campus from 1999-2014.

From 2014-2016 he was seconded full-time to the TU4Dublin Support Team (www.tu4dublin.ie). He is a Fellow of the Irish Computer Society and is a member of the board of AHEAD (<https://ahead.ie/>) and his research interests and publications include distance education, educational technology, instructional design, computer science education and universal design for learning.

This article appeared in the AHEAD Journal. Visit www.ahead.ie/journal for more information
