



“NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION”

SUBMISSION TO:
HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGY GROUP

SLIGO CHAMBER SUBMISSION

19TH June 2009

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This submission has been prepared in response to the invitation from the Higher Education Strategy Group to all stakeholders to make submissions in respect of the development of the vision and objectives for higher education in Ireland.

As one of the largest business organisations in the North West, Sligo Chamber, which represents over 320 businesses, is a major stakeholder in the continued growth and future development of the region.

This submission by Sligo Chamber aims to highlight the benefits of the existing higher education in the region and some core issues relating to the future development of higher education.

1. EXISTING EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE

Sligo boasts two excellent third level educational institutions in the Institute of Technology and St. Angela's College which cater for very different educational needs. They are both a valuable and substantial resource for the region.

The Institute of Technology, Sligo has gone from strength to strength over the last 38 years, with one of many significant highlights being the right to make Doctorate level awards in 2006. Presently, they have 5800 registered students who are completing programmes up to and including PhDs, and they employ 600 people. The generated contribution to the local economy in financial terms alone is estimated at €85m. It is also estimated that on average 30-40% of graduates remain in the region on completion of their academic studies, thereby providing the region with a highly skilled workforce, one of the key factors in attracting potential employers to any location. The I.T. Sligo has ambitious plans to extend this to 7000 students over the next three years which will in turn have a positive knock on effect on employee levels and generated revenue for the region.

St. Angela's College Sligo, which is founded on over 400 years of education tradition, has a well-deserved reputation for delivering high quality programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate. Although established as a College of Education for Home Economics, it has undergone significant metamorphosis and has expanded far beyond its original remit. Currently its profile of academic programmes includes Nursing & Health Studies, Education, Special Needs Education, Theology, Food and Consumer Studies, Science, Irish, Economics and Social Studies. In addition to the expansion of the college and its facilities, one of its major achievements in recent years is its successful linkage with NUI Galway and its subsequent ability to provide University Level education. St. Angela's currently employs 150 staff who along with the 950 registered students contribute an estimated €8-10m to the local economy.

2. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Sligo Chamber feels that the following three areas are key considerations which the Higher Education Strategy Group should take on board in their review:

- **Balanced Regional Development**

Despite Government policies and plans (National Spatial Strategy; NDP; Transport 21), they have largely failed in its objective to achieve balanced regional development. It is vital therefore, that as a result of this consultation and review process, a greater coordination of the education system with the National Skills Strategy and the regional development agenda, as outlined by Government for regional gateways and their hubs, will exist.

As the Gateway City of the North West region, Sligo is also a thriving administrative, commercial and educational centre which has seen unprecedented growth over the past five to seven years. However, the northwest and BMW region faces serious challenges, and without commitment to investment in infrastructure to support the development of education and industry, Sligo Chamber fears that the emerging divide between the North West and the rest of the country will continue to expand.

This is why, it is important, now more than ever, to maintain a strategic focus on all the region's needs. Higher education institutions, in particular, are recognised as drivers of economic development and a highly educated and skilled workforce is the engine of a knowledge economy. Investing in the educational infrastructure is vital to delivering sustainable regional development. Without due focus and investment, it will become increasingly difficult to attract further investment and industry.

It is vital therefore that whatever new structure is provided for in the new Higher Education Strategy, Sligo remains the centre for higher education in the region.

- **Increased Accountability**

Ireland and all sectors of industry from both a private and public perspective are facing tough and serious challenges. We are all experiencing very difficult and turbulent times and must adapt accordingly in order to sustain business and activities. The Higher Education Authority is no exception. Greater accountability of public spending and efficiencies must be high on the agenda within this consultation forum.

A national higher education plan should be aligned with second level educational targets and national skills priorities and should take its lead from international benchmarking targets.

- **Greater Interaction**

Educational institutions are not stand alone institutions. Rather they serve a very real remit within the future development of economies. They must therefore closely align themselves with the future needs and development plans of the country and indeed of local regions, as well as the ever changing needs of the business sector in order to

harness the most potential out of its public resources and facilities. It is of paramount importance, that greater interaction and co-ordination between the business community and the educational institutions, is enshrined in the new strategy for higher education.