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SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

Subject: Submission on PLS: Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026

Date: 9th June 2026

From: John McGahon, CEO Dundalk Chamber

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1. Executive Summary

Dundalk Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide input to Committee members regarding the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026.

The proposal to amend the Technological Universities Act 2018 to enable Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) to enter a strategic partnership with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and transition into a Technological University College represents a landmark moment for higher education on the island of Ireland. This legislation establishes a top-tier university footprint right on our doorstep, essential for securing the future talent, investment, and cross-border commercial opportunities our economy needs to thrive.

2. Strategic Context and Regional Impact

The Dublin-Belfast Economic corridor, which combines the eight Local Authorities between Dublin and Belfast, is the economic engine of the island of Ireland. Within the last decade, the M1 Corridor linking the three urban centres of Dundalk, Drogheda and Newry as identified in the 2040 National Development Plan, has experienced rapid industrial growth, particularly in high-value sectors like biopharma, engineering, digital tech, and logistics. To sustain this momentum, local businesses require immediate access to a highly skilled, university-educated workforce.

While DkIT has been an outstanding asset to businesses in Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, and Meath, its unique border geography created structural hurdles to achieving university status under the original 2018 framework. By creating a formal mechanism for DkIT to partner with Queen's University Belfast, this Bill provides an innovative and pragmatic pathway to greatly enhance the educational offering right in the heart of the M1 Corridor.

- Countering Regional Brain Drain: Providing an internationally recognized university qualifications will ensure talent can stay embedded in the local economy during their formative professional years, benefiting local employers.
- Cross-Border Economic Catalyst: When multinational companies look to invest, the presence of a high-calibre university is an attractive prospect. A formalised alliance between a leading Northern Irish research university and a southern institute deeply embedded in regional enterprise will instantly elevate the region's profile, creating an ecosystem ripe for both foreign direct investment (FDI) and indigenous business growth, while making the M1 Corridor significantly more attractive to IDA and Invest NI prospects.

3. Key Strengths of the All-Island University Group Model

The "Technological University College" designation introduces a dynamic new tier to the Irish higher education landscape. The Committee should note several core benefits of this model:

- **Enhanced Research Capacity**: DkIT will gain immediate access to enhanced research networks, joint PhD supervision, and shared funding bids (including EU Horizon Europe and Interreg funds).
- **Curriculum Diversification**: Students in the North-East will benefit from joint degree programs, credit transfer systems, and access to a broader spectrum of disciplines, blending QUB's academic research strengths with DkIT's proven track record in industry-aligned, practical education.
- **Operational Autonomy with Scale**: The model allows DkIT to maintain its distinct regional identity, governance, and focus on access and lifelong learning, while leveraging the institutional scale and prestige of a major university partner.

4. Conclusion

The Technological Universities All Island University Group (Amendment) Bill 2026 is an imaginative piece of legislation that turns the concept of a "Shared Island" into a tangible educational reality. It offers Dundalk Institute of Technology a clear, prestigious, and highly effective route to achieving university-level impact, to the immense benefit of students, families, and businesses across the M1 Corridor.

We fully endorse the Bill and would like to congratulate Minister James Lawless TD and the Government for bringing this piece of legislation to Cabinet. We look forward to seeing the legislation progress efficiently through the Oireachtas.