

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **THIRD LEVEL CAMPUS IDENTIFIED AS A DRIVER FOR KILKENNY'S ECONOMY AND TO RETAIN LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE COUNTY**

A Report commissioned by Kilkenny County Council concludes that there is a very compelling educational, social and economic case for locating a higher education campus catering for 1,000 students in Kilkenny and that all options should be explored including tying into the proposed Technological University of the South East (TUSE) being jointly pursued by Waterford IT and IT Carlow.

The report concludes that demand for third level education places nationally over the next 10 years supports the case for third level capacity expansion in general, and for a campus facility in Kilkenny in particular. The Report concludes that Kilkenny is an ideal location to help provide for this third level capacity expansion and while it does not advocate that Kilkenny should seek to have a stand-alone third level facility, it does outline options as to how Kilkenny can successfully achieve this in the short term.

One of the options is through the development of a campus facility in Kilkenny as part of the proposed Technological University of the South East (TUSE). While the Report notes that the Steering Group for the establishment of the TUSE is due to report with its strategy for progressing the TUSE by next September, it outlines other options for meeting the objective of delivering a campus in Kilkenny. The objective is to have a sustainable, appropriate 3rd level offering in Kilkenny that adds value not just to Kilkenny but to the South East Region while performing a national function in meeting unmet needs and growing demands for 3rd Level. A campus in Kilkenny should contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the citizens of Kilkenny and the South East region.

The Report states that it would not serve Kilkenny well to simply have a third level facility for the sake of it. The aim should be that any campus facility developed should be significant in its own right capable of becoming a centre of excellence with national and international reach. Kilkenny County Council has set a base target of 1,000 full-time students. The Council believes that a facility of this scale is not just necessary but is also feasible, especially in the context of the additional 57,000 full-time third level places that the Higher education Authority (HEA) state will be needed nationally over the next 10 years.

The report recommends that any third level facility developed in Kilkenny should be based on niche areas that reflect the county's economic activities and strengths across disciplines such as design, crafts, animation, heritage, tourism and the agri-food industry. Kilkenny County Council is already developing proposals for centres of excellence with WIT and IT Carlow in the areas of "precision agriculture" and "design thinking" respectively. While these proposals are small in scale they nevertheless are a practical demonstration of the ongoing work taking place. In time these developments have the potential to be aligned with any new campus facility and can help support the development of centres of excellence.

Minister with Special Responsibility for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, TD, stated at the launch that any third level facility should be based on the County's niche areas to create an international centre of excellence that reflect the county's economic activities and strengths. This would include focusing on education and training in the design, crafts, animation, heritage, tourism and the agri-food industry for which Kilkenny is synonymous. This would create a competitive context into which a wider range of providers are likely to enter, broadening the potential choices for the Council, and ultimately the prospect of successful, high quality and sustainable education and training provision in the city.

The Minister said:

*"Kilkenny County Council is already developing proposals for centres of excellence in the areas of precision agriculture and design thinking with Waterford IT and IT Carlow respectively. Kilkenny is synonymous with high quality Irish craft / design and the agri-food industry and a third level campus would serve to further build on these areas of expertise and strengthen the County's economy."*

The Council is well aware of the limitations in the Exchequer finances in funding capital expenditure for third level buildings and associated infrastructure.

*"We not only have the economic case for higher education, we also have the right space to provide for a third level campus. The Abbey Quarter urban renewal project in the heart of Kilkenny city would be greatly enhanced with a vibrant academic community, in keeping with the Abbey Quarter Masterplan. Design guidelines have recently been adopted for the Abbey Quarter, which will support the early delivery of a third level campus,"* says Colette Byrne, Chief Executive of Kilkenny County Council.

She said: *"It is important to say that no formal arrangements have been put in place to deliver on any of the options put forward in the Report, but a Campus of the proposed TUSE is certainly a viable option worth pursuing. Kilkenny County Council will fully explore the potential opportunities and will*

*play its role in delivering a sustainable and appropriate educational offering that will play to the strengths of Kilkenny and the South East region. We now have a framework and we will move quickly to work with stakeholders to turn the vision into a reality. Such a facility would act as a much needed stimulus for the social and economic development of not just Kilkenny but the wider south east and would help galvanise the region, and help reverse the debilitating brain drain from which the region suffers.”*

*“We will, as recommended, keep an open mind on what would work best for Kilkenny. I acknowledge the general support from Waterford IT and IT Carlow for our Report and I also look forward to hearing how Kilkenny will feature in their joint strategy for the TUSE,”* said Cllr David Fitzgerald, Chairman Kilkenny County Council.

He said: *“This report is not an end in itself. The onus is now on Kilkenny County Council to take the initiative to ensure that this report will provide the impetus to finally deliver on the third level facility that Kilkenny deserves. And the quality of life for which Kilkenny is renowned would provide for a rich student experience.”*

The report will be available on the Kilkenny Co Co website from 4pm this afternoon (30<sup>th</sup> April, 2018).

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