

## **SYMPOSIUM ON THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY IN THE 1990s**

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### **29% INCREASE IN STUDENT DEMAND AT UCG**

Ireland's demographic structure is such that demand for university places from 18-year-olds will continue to grow for at least a decade. In this we differ from other EC countries.

CAO figures for 1990 support this interpretation. First-preference applications for university entrance next autumn are up by 5.2 per cent on last year. This figure hides great variations between institutions. Thus, the demand at University College Galway is extraordinarily high at 29.2 per cent over the 1989 figure. Indeed, UCG applications account for 41 per cent of this year's increased national demand for student places.

The popularity of UCG puts great pressure on an institution which has suffered greatly from the cutbacks of recent years. In spite of these, the College plans to respond by admitting an additional 260 students next September. While some Government assistance for this development was provided for in the 1990 budget, the pressures on the horizon are such that continued support for staff, accommodation and facilities will be needed if the College is not to disappoint hundreds of potential students in the years ahead.

While detailed analysis of the reasons for the increased student demand this year remains to be undertaken, it is perhaps significant that the percentage increases are greatest in the faculties of Arts and Science, even though the number of applicants in Engineering, Commerce and other

faculties are also up on last year. This suggests that many young people today recognise the desirability of acquiring a liberal, broad education before committing themselves to a particular vocation or profession. In order to accommodate this trend, the College provides an increasing number of postgraduate courses ranging from Biotechnology to Journalism, from Information Technology to Aquaculture.

The content of undergraduate courses is also under constant review. Increased emphasis is being placed in all faculties on courses in computing and applied continental languages, while some of the science courses are new and aimed specifically at providing graduates of particular interest to Irish society in areas such as marine science, earth sciences, computer studies, applied chemistry and applied physics.

An important function of the recently established Office of Science and Technology is to harness for economic and social development scientific research conducted in Ireland. Among the institutions which have been identified as possessing major potential to contribute to this national effort are the universities. Hundreds of graduate students register for higher degrees every year and their teachers are being encouraged to direct them towards intellectually challenging problems, the result of which might be applied in Ireland. The Programme for Advanced Technology supported by this Office requires participating universities to select research areas which are complimentary to each other within a national overall plan, thus achieving centres of concentration of researchers, equipment and other facilities. Such centres, in their size and organisation, would build up to the 'critical mass' necessary to ensure success in applied research today.

The first Programme is in Biotechnology; research in six university institutions is co-ordinated by a company, BioResearch (Ireland) within EOLAS. A director is appointed in each university institution and researchers are assigned to these by BioResearch in accordance with the success of their research, and its attractiveness to industry. Scientists are encouraged to take out patents on their discoveries and it is hoped that, in due course, royalties will flow to them and their universities. Contract research for specific companies can also be undertaken in the centres. In some cases the industries may be abroad; the advantage to Ireland is that researchers provide their services from here, rather than emigrating and, in so doing,

earn monies which can be used to improve the service available in time to Irish companies.

Other such Programmes are planned in areas such as Advanced Manufacturing Technology and Optoelectronics. Through these mechanisms, Ireland Inc. can put its technological house in order and be less dependent in future on imported technology as a basis for its industry. Consortia of their size also make us more credible for EC support from Structural Funds than if each institution - small by European standards - were to make its own case in Brussels.