

Too many universities, or too few?

Tue, Jan 26, 2010

Madam, – Contrary to Peter Sutherland’s opinion (Home News, January 23rd), there is little to suggest that Ireland has too many universities. We have seven universities for our population of 4.5 million, while Finland has 10 universities, six institutes with university status, and 28 polytechnics for its population of 5.3 million. Sweden has 17 universities for its 9.3 million people. Neither is there evidence that bigger universities are necessarily better. For instance, the average number of students in the top 10 universities in the world is only 16,700, which is smaller than the current number of students in UCC (18,800).

Mr Sutherland also commends the research alliance between TCD and UCD and the abolition of the NUI. But rather than fostering bilateral alliances to create one world-class university, we should instead focus on creating a world-class university system, not least because some decisions and activities (such as the purchase and retention of research databases) are best located at this level. Indeed, if we require good, healthy structures at the systemic level, then perhaps we should have been strengthening rather than abolishing the NUI.

The success of the California Master Plan for Higher Education shows the merits of dividing up post-secondary education into different sectors, with a clear mission and institutional structure for each sector, allied to a comprehensive set of coherent links between the sectors. – Is mise,

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