

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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A rapid expansion of the facilities for higher education has taken place throughout the United Kingdom over the past twenty years. From inception, it has been widely accepted that the new institutions of higher education should where possible, be located in principle centres of population. Maximum benefit could then be expected to accrue both to the institutions concerned and to the cities selected. The desirability of maximising direct access in this way was also confirmed at that time by official bodies including the Robbins Committee and the University Grants Committee, whilst the National Union of University Teachers had earlier recommended that an absolute minimum city population of 50,000 should be insisted upon.

The figure of 50,000 arises from an assessment of a city size adequate to sustain the additional services which a large number of students and staff are bound to make upon it, including modern shopping facilities, suitable housing, a good and varied choice of schools and a reservoir of non-academic staff.

Again the host city must be large enough to absorb perhaps thousands of students and hundreds of staff in such a way that its distinctive character remains unaffected, whilst the special demands which will be made in terms of cultural entertainment would require the provision of the widest spectrum possible.

Above all the student body requires the stimulation of a reasonable large and socially diverse community together with the opportunity to enjoy the advantages of the high standard of urban civilisation which Derry with its urban population of 72,000 its District Council population of 90,000 and its catchment population of c.200,000 can so readily provide.

The City's situation at over 75 miles from the main University and Polytechnic centres in Belfast means that it serves an area at furthest remove from these institutions whilst Dublin, the nearest university centre in the Republic, is over 160 miles distant.

The centre of Derry is completely circumscribed by the city walls over one mile in length, in places twenty feet high, with a carriageway 24 feet wide. It is one of the finest examples of a walled city in Europe, and the streets within, follow the original pattern.

The city is the centre of the North West area of Ireland, situated at the base of the Inishowen peninsula. It enjoys easy access to the scenic waterways of Lough Foyle and Lough Swilly, the fine sandy beaches of Inishowen and N. Derry, the Sperrin and the Donegal hills, and the lakes of Fermanagh.

In character, Derry is recognisably different from, but complementary to, the Eastern area of N. Ireland - the values of both being essential to the total flavour of the province. In addition, Derry's historic and cultural heritage is reinforced by the city's social, educational and industrial advantages.

The city is a road, rail and sea communications centre and it now has Eglinton airport eight miles away with daily services to Dublin and Scotland. BBC Radio Foyle broadcasts from Derry whilst a local commercial radio station has been licensed, and BBC television transmission is in prospect.

Nowhere more than 6/7 miles from the Irish Republic the city is especially likely to benefit from cross-border co-operation particularly in view of the heavy excess of student numbers over facilities available in the Republic for higher education.

The Derry is situated in the extreme West of N. Ireland in EEC terms it is in the centre of the N. West Region of Ireland. Because the area is a peripheral one, in a border zone and affected by the decline of its traditional industries, it would be entitled to special consideration. An application of British/Irish origin for EEC assistance to plan schemes of reciprocal educational benefit would attract support.

Prior to 1972, Magee University College had an honourable record of participation in undergraduate education spanning over a century with Trinity College Dublin. In that year however, undergraduate studies ceased in Derry and were concentrated exclusively in Coleraine (present urban population c18,000). Over the years since then, a very serious shortfall in projected student numbers in Coleraine has caused the present crisis, which threatens not only the closure of the Coleraine campus, but also the end of university education in the North West.

The present under-use of university facilities at Coleraine is however, a symptom of the crisis, not the cause. The crisis cannot therefore be averted by filling the vacant spaces at Coleraine with additional courses whether academic or applied, because that would simply recycle the crisis with the same result in the end.

The solution lies instead in concentrating resources into developing higher level educational facilities in Derry. S4.8 of the White Paper expresses this adequately - "As the only campus of the new institution that will be located in the middle of a large concentration of population and as serving an area remote from the educational facilities of the Belfast area, the Government acknowledges the force of the Review Group view that fuller use could and should be made of Magee in meeting the immediate requirements of the Londonderry Area". The very significant contribution which the Derry campus can make to the success of the merger, must be exploited to the full in conjunction with the facilities sustainable at Coleraine. This should ensure the future of university education in the North West which the White Paper S3.10 strongly supports.

The new institution therefore needs the provision of the full range of higher educational facilities at Derry - undergraduate, post graduate, adult, and equivalents, in both academic and applied disciplines. The Derry campus should be of full and equal status with the other campuses of the new institution, and this should be recognised in the new Charter envisaged.

The Government expects White Paper S4.8 the new institution to make "maximum use of Magee in the provision of courses and activities which relate directly to the immediate requirements of the Londonderry Area". S2.2 which states that "the extent of the demand is determined by the number of school leavers seeking admission to traditional undergraduate courses", helps to identify the immediate requirements referred to, whilst S4.6 expresses official preference for a practical and applied emphasis.

Finally, S2.5.b11 states that "as the largest centre of population the Belfast area naturally has the main concentration of higher education courses", it should follow that Derry - having by far the next highest concentration of population in the area most remote from Belfast - should naturally have the next best provision of higher education courses.

Another definite signpost to the particular needs of the Derry area must be the wide range of high level courses presently meeting demand very effectively in spite of difficult conditions in the North West College of Technology, Altnagelvin Hospital, and Magee.

In addition, the wide spectrum of employment in the Derry area, public and private, local, national and international, creates its own demand for higher educational facilities eg part-time studies, day releases etc. which cannot be as readily satisfied elsewhere because of its close links with the life of the community here.

The inherent attraction to incoming industry of an available work force in a base of Derrys size, would be greatly enhanced by a local technological third level unit of education, whilst the existence of the latter would also encourage facilities for industrial consultancy.

The current unsatisfied demand for the Certificate in Foundation Studies at Magee indicates a potential which could be met and expanded by developing the Foundation Course as the first year of a two year Diploma in Higher Education, with the option of progress to a degree subsequently.

The Civic Committee therefore proposes that the Steering Group initiate discussion with the bodies concerned in order to seek agreement to transfer the appropriate level three courses at the North West College of Technology, Altnagelvin Hospital and Magee, to the responsibility of the new institution, grouped into the faculties of Science & Technology, Business and Management, and Paramedical Studies.

In addition, the faculties of Humanities and Social Studies, Art and Design, and Agriculture and Fisheries should be established to consolidate the Derry campus of the new institution and meet the immediate needs of the Derry Area.

The campus itself should be located primarily either at the Magee site, or at the North West College of Technology site, and the faculties should be funded to expand outward and upward to degree level.

The fact that the existing buildings at the NWCT are working to capacity means that desirable high level expansion sought by and well within the capacity of present staff and resources, cannot be undertaken. The acceleration of the Youth Training Programme schemes due to commence this year, makes the necessity for additional space even more urgent, whilst the remit of the new institution offers a fresh and exciting opportunity for development up to the highest level.

It is not yet apparent whether the new institution is to have an autonomous, federal, or integrated character, though the Civic Committee would rate its preference in that order - with the emphasis strongly on autonomy.

In any event, if the Derry campus is to have the significance ascribed in White Paper S4.8 and elsewhere, it should have a correspondingly significant role in the scope, structure and organisation of the new institution.

Sites for expanded educational facilities in Derry are available. Presently the Magee buildings (c.500 student potential nonresident) are part of NUU, but much underused. Magee is also part of a c.21 acre site lying between Lawrence Hill and Rock Road, and bounded by Northland Road and Strand Road which had been earmarked for use as an educational location although that includes the Aberfoyle site (c.6 acres) which is privately owned at present.

The remaining area contains in addition to the Magee buildings the old Foyle College building, now vacant and owned by the City Council, (c.250 student potential non-resident~~ed~~) which is currently being rehabilitated. The site also contains ample space for permanent and temporary buildings.

There are also possibilities for acquiring and converting to educational usage, various other buildings if required, in several areas of the city.