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Institute to continue campus project despite funding cuts

Sean Flynn

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EDUCATION:DUBLIN INSTITUTE of Technology (DIT) says it hopes more than half of its activities will be based in the new Grangegorman campus by 2016 despite the scaling back of exchequer funding announced yesterday.

The implementation of the Grangegorman project and a series of other proposed third-level building projects – where contracts have not been finalised – are the main casualties of the revised capital spending programme in education. New law and medical schools for UCD and a medical school for NUI Galway will not receive State support.

Work has already begun on the UCD Sutherland law school, which is largely supported by private funding. UCD said it was “disappointed” with the decision last night.

DIT president, Prof Brian Norton, expressed his disappointment, but said he was also heartened by the Government’s continuing support for the project and for elements of it that involve public-private partnerships (PPP).

Prof Norton said the institute remained committed to its ambitious plan for the 73-acre Grangegorman project in north Dublin. Originally, it hoped to relocate all of its 39 buildings in Dublin city to Grangegorman; it hopes more than 50 per cent of its activities can be based at the new campus within five years.

DIT said it would look to private sources for funding to proceed with the Grangegorman project.

Prof Norton stressed the project had been designed around a range of flexible building packages to match available funding. “Exchequer funding is one important element but other essential funding for the project arises from leveraging savings on the rent-roll for existing properties, sale of DIT-owned properties, PPP bundles and privately funded elements through philanthropy.”

Minister for Education Ruairí Quinn said that “unfortunately, in relation to DIT’s Grangegorman campus development, exchequer infrastructure investment will be postponed for the lifetime of the investment framework and planning will take place towards an initial public private partnership project, for possible completion in 2017”.

Overall, the Department of Education will receive €440 million annually for capital projects over the next five years – down from about €500 million this year.

Mr Quinn said soaring birth rates were putting unprecedented demands on schools; the Government, he said, had little choice but to prioritise school building projects.

Total enrolment in both primary and post-primary schools is expected to grow by almost 70,000 between now and 2018 – over 45,000 at primary level and 25,000 at post-primary – and will continue to grow up to at least 2024 at post-primary level.

The latest figures show the highest number of births registered in any quarter since 1960.

The Minister said that his priority was now to focus on major school projects and smaller projects devolved to schools to meet the demographic demands.

“The primary aim will be to ensure that every child will have access to a school place,” he said.

The planned investment for the next five years will provide more than 100,000 permanent school places, of which over 80,000 will be additional school places. The remainder will be replacement of temporary or unsatisfactory accommodation.

Mr Quinn promised to publish details of the school building programme for 2012 next month. Details of the five-year programme of school building will be published early in the new year.

Higher education capital investment projects with existing capital commitments in place will be completed. These include the UCD science centre, the University of Limerick medical school, NUI Maynooth's library project and the new campus development at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

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