

Opening Statement

Dr Deirdre Lillis, President of Technological University Dublin

The Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science,

Thursday 25th September 2025

A Cathaoirleach, Teachtaí Dála agus Seanadóirí, go raibh maith agaibh.

TU Dublin has over 27,000 students and 3,500 staff across five campuses—Grangegorman, Tallaght, Blanchardstown, Aungier Street, and Bolton Street. We offer programmes from apprenticeships to PhDs in science, engineering, business, arts, and tourism, driving talent and innovation for Dublin and Ireland. Ranked highest for graduate employability in the city, we pride ourselves on opening career doors for students from all backgrounds.

Our students reflect Ireland's diversity, representing every county and 138 nationalities. Our surveys show that 46% of our students commute over 60 minutes and 13% travel more than 90 minutes to class.

I welcome the chance to discuss student accommodation. Housing availability and affordability directly affect access, wellbeing, and Ireland's ability to develop talent. Dublin faces a severe shortage of purpose-built, affordable options.

TU Dublin currently has no on-campus accommodation. Adding student beds across our campuses would transform campus life. Student housing is more than a place to sleep – it builds wellbeing, belonging, academic success and peer learning.

While some students choose to live at home, many face 3–4 hour round trips because accommodation is unavailable or unaffordable. This is exhausting, distressing, unfair and risks students dropping out.

Practice-based learning is central at TU Dublin. We partner with employers to give students real-world experience through placements and projects. Without accessible accommodation, the quality of work-integrated learning and our graduates' work-readiness are at risk.

TU Dublin trains the electricians, engineers, apprentices and tradespeople vital to Ireland's construction and engineering sectors. Enrolments in these fields must be supported as they are fundamental to Ireland's economic growth, social inclusion and national infrastructure.

Our campuses are beacons of opportunity. On campus accommodation would energise Tallaght, Blanchardstown and Grangegorman campuses for example, especially evenings and weekends, and enable year-round community, enterprise and academic use.

We are open to innovative models, including dual-use accommodation for enterprise or key workers outside term time, or week/weekend models, adding capacity to the wider housing ecosystem.

We must not forget that some students will still struggle with affordability; for others, personal circumstances will make it impossible; and we must remember that TUs

were founded to provide accessible education through strong local community links, including to students who are the first in their families to attend higher education.

In this debate, we must ensure any investment in additional student accommodation is balanced with convenient travel options and other essential services for all students.

A key enabler is a borrowing framework for TUs. Even modest borrowing would let us deliver student accommodation and enhanced services, while protecting the State balance sheet.

The first graduate of a Technological University was over 130 years ago from Kevin Street but the upcoming Seanad election is the first time TU graduates can vote. TU graduates helped build this State. TU students deserve equal opportunities with traditional universities. TUs must have the same access to borrowing frameworks, capital supports and state-backed financing.

TU Dublin strongly supports the Technological Universities Association 2026 pre-budget submission, which calls for capital funding to meet rising student demand, investment in technology, estates and cybersecurity.

We welcome the current Programme for Government's commitments on state-financed student accommodation and borrowing frameworks for TUs. We urge the forthcoming Student Accommodation Strategy to 2035 to meet these commitments. We thank the Committee for its work and for the opportunity to engage in this debate.

In summary, we want our young people to have a full, meaningful college experience equal to or better than their parents', whatever their circumstances. TU

Dublin stands ready to work with Government, the TU sector and stakeholders to deliver affordable student accommodation, while improving services for all students.

Is rud bunriachtanach é seo d'fhorbairt shóisialta agus gheilleagrach na hÉireann.
This is vital for Ireland's social and economic development.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

ENDS.