



Ar Scáth a chéile: Elected Councillors and University Governing Authorities

Submission setting out basis for retaining local authority elected members on the Governing
Bodies of Irish University Colleges

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**On behalf the Executive Committee and Membership of the Association of Irish Local
Government**

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Purpose of this submission

The purpose of this submission is to demonstrate the contribution that elected local authority members have made to the good governance of Ireland's universities and to articulate the reasons why that contribution should be safeguarded in the reformed legislation.

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THE CASE FOR RETAINING COUNCILLORS ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNING BODIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over a hundred years elected councillors have made a significant contribution to the governing authorities of Irish universities with eight Councillors being nominated to the governing authority of UCD by the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) and seven councillors being nominated by local authorities to both the boards of UCC and NUIG. The involvement of elected councillors was enshrined in the founding Charters of the colleges.

Since 2018, there has been a move towards reform of the governance of higher education. The legislative reform proposals envisage a significant reduction in the size of governing authorities. The proposals do not include any reference to the inclusion of elected councillors on the reformed governing authorities, an omission which would have the effect of eliminating the aforesaid seats held by Councillors. AILG and its members are deeply concerned about the reform proposals. AILG has already made a submission to the Consultation on the Reform of the Higher Education Authority Act in February 2021.

The Association welcomes the Minister's commitment to 'the elevation of higher education and research to a central and more visible position at local and national level'¹ but AILG asserts that elected councillors should be retained on the governing authorities because of the qualities, experience and positional legitimacy they bring, namely:

- **REPRESENTATIVENESS:** Councillors represent the public interest. They are elected by ALL those that are resident in Ireland and thus have the legitimacy to speak on their behalf. Through their daily encounters with citizens, Councillors bring an awareness and understanding of citizen views and concerns regarding higher education to the governing processes.
- **ROLE and EXPERIENCE:** Through their work on local authorities, Councillors have considerable experience of decision-making about the allocation and utilisation of public resources as well as familiarity with risk-management and compliance

¹ Update on legislative reform of the Higher Education Authority Act, February, 2021

processes in large organisations. They are well experienced as trustees of the wider public good.

- **MULTI-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT:** Councillors are involved in developing shared solutions to local and regional challenges. Their involvement in HEI governing bodies furthers our national government's ambitions towards joined up governance and specifically its efforts to achieve 'a broader 'whole of government' coordination of higher education'
- **CONNECTEDNESS:** Not only are Councillors connected with their local communities but they are involved in a range of organisations in their localities/regions. Having elected councillors on the governing authorities, means that information can be shared, priorities aligned, collaborative advantage exploited and voices from the regions/localities heard. This means they can contribute to strengthening HEIs' regional impact by fostering linkages and creating synergies between the diverse actors
- **DIVERSITY:** Councillors come from a range of backgrounds – urban, suburban and rural and also come from a diversity of professional backgrounds and have diverse competences. Such diversity is an asset to governing authorities.
- **QUALITIES AND COMPETENCE:** Councillors bring a range of professional, experiential and personal attributes as well as collaborative and decision-making skills and political awareness and astuteness. Their diverse lay competences complement the specialisms existing in HEIs. Councillors can bring views formed outside the groves of academe to what might otherwise be a rather socio-culturally homogenous forum.
- **EDUCATION SECTOR EXPERIENCE,** Councillors' involvement in other tiers of education enables them to link the various strands of education and bring an understanding of educational issues at the various levels.

The European Universities Association asserts that universities require 'a productive relationship with public authorities and an enabling regulatory framework'². We believe the current reform proposal can achieve this but only if provision is incorporated to retain elected councillors as governing authority members. Enactment of the proposals in their current

² European University Association (2019) *Efficiency, Effectiveness and Value for Money in our Universities*

format would seriously diminish the democratic efficacy of the governing authorities, weaken the diversity of views on those bodies, fragment the networks that have been built or strengthened through councillor involvement and limit the skill-set, experience and competences available.

For the reasons outlined above, AILG urges the Minister and his Oireachtas colleagues to amend the reform proposals and retain and legislate for the presence of elected councillors on university governing authorities.



THE CASE FOR RETAINING COUNCILLORS ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNING BODIES

AN ISSUES PAPER SETTING OUT THE CASE IN DETAIL

1. Introduction

Higher Education institutions (HEIs) are key players from both global and local perspectives, contributing not only to educational but also to social and economic development. The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) acknowledges the influence of Ireland's HEI's and is proud that AILG members have contributed to their endeavours. The Association also recognises that the demands on HEIs and their operating conditions have changed and that reform is both timely and laudable. The co-regulation model proposed by the Minister seeks to ensure institutional autonomy while also assuring accountability in the deployment of public resources. However, the recalibration of university governance needs to ensure effective public representation. As the national representative body for county councillors, AILG believes its members have a vital role to play in facilitating the connection between higher education and the public that it serves and ensuring maximum impact from those public resources.

This Issues Paper explores the background and implications of the proposed changes and makes the case for retention of elected councillors on the reformed governing authorities. Following publication of a Working Paper by Mr. Liam Kenny, Director, AILG in February 2021, the Association commissioned Dr Bríd Quinn to prepare an Issues Paper on the topic, jointly with AILG. The Issues Paper sets out the reform context, the background to Councillor involvement on governing authorities, their role in promoting joined up government and the qualities and experience they bring to governing authorities. It concludes by outlining AILG's response to particular sections of the legislative proposals. Councillor participation on governing authorities has long been recognised and valued. **It is vital for effective governance of HEIs that local elected representatives continue to have a designated role on the reformed governing authorities.**

2. The representational role of Councillors

In addition to their core role of representing citizens and their interests in local government, elected councillors participate in a range of external bodies with varying purposes, structures and scales. In her review of the role and remuneration of Councillors, Moorhead highlights the importance of the representational role of councillors on external bodies. She states that they ‘implement and ensure that the policies of the executive council are reflected in the activities of the external body while influencing such activities in line with local authority thinking and ethos’³. This external representational role reinforces councillors’ responsibility as trustees of the wider public good.

The range of bodies on which Councillors participate is broad. At county and sub-county level they represent their council on various boards, companies, state agencies, groups and committees, often because the Council is a stakeholder and/or funder of the particular body. At regional level, they participate in bodies such as Regional Assemblies, HSE Forums, Education and Training Boards, Cross Border Bodies, Sports Partnerships, Drugs Task Forces, River Basin Management Committees and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Many of the bodies have an educational focus, e.g., ETBs and SOLAS. There has long been a link between higher education institutions and elected councillors as detailed in later sections.

As a national representative body for county councillors, AILG has championed the role that councillors play in facilitating the connection between higher education and the public that it serves. Now, however, the link between the system of local government and the governance of higher education is at risk of being severed. Documents such as the *Outline of the Legislative Proposals for the Reform of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971* (2018), the *Consultation Report on the legislative reform of the Higher Education Authority Act* (2019) and the *Update on legislative reform of the Higher Education Authority Act* (February 2021) pave the way for significant reform of the governance of HEIs. The proposals advocate a stark reduction in the size of governing authorities, a move which would curtail if not totally abolish the involvement of councillors on HEI governing authorities. A significant proportion of university funding comes from the State. This involves a considerable public interest

³ Moorhead, 2020:15

dimension which must be protected in any new legislation. Continuing to designate places for councillors on governing authorities can ensure that protection.

3. The Reform Context

Changing socio-political, economic, demographic and educational concerns have affected what universities do and how they do it, resulting in ongoing reform. Reforms have impacted not only on the internal structures and processes of HEIs but also on their governance structures and processes. Reform trends have resulted in the opening of HEIs to greater public scrutiny along with obligations to fulfil the higher expectations of both governments and societies. Given the very important role HEIs play in national social and economic and development as well as their financial dependence on public and private sources, good governance is paramount. As in other spheres, university governance is mainly concerned with enhancing accountability and assuring (education) quality. In many countries, the state-university relationship has changed as a result of reform. In the Netherlands the approach changed from legislation and regulations to a steering from a distance approach. By contrast, in the UK, Australia and New Zealand governments have increased their intervention and regulation despite a tradition of HEI autonomy (Capano and Pritoni, 2020; de Boer and Maassen, 2020).

A combination of international and domestic catalysts has led to changes in the state-university relationship in Ireland. The reform trends in other countries; EU innovations and obligations such as the Bologna process; Ireland's changing social and economic contexts; the differing government priorities and party perspectives on education and the variety of goals assigned to higher education have led to continuous reform. As a result, 'restructuring, performance management and strategizing became key pillars of HE policy reform leading to system reconfiguration, inter-institutional collaboration and changed governance'⁴. The state-university relationship was strongly reinforced by the appointment of a Minister of State for Higher Education in 2017 and creation of a full Ministry and Department of Higher Education, Innovation and Research in 2020. The latest chapter in the reform saga puts a particular focus on governance issues. The reform proposals focus on both the role and formal

⁴ Quinn, 2020: 171

relationships of the HEA (Higher Education Authority) and the internal and external governance of HEIs with the aim of bringing ‘greater legislative definition to this engagement’.

In 1968 an *ad hoc* Higher Education Authority (HEA) was established and in 1971, the HEA was given statutory responsibility to advise the Minister on the country’s needs in higher education and allocate and monitor state funding of higher education. Since then, the HEA has progressively assumed multiple roles – advisory body, policy shaper, policy enforcer, allocator of funding and system co-ordinator but its legislative base does not reflect its expanded functions. In 2018, written submissions were requested on the reform of the HEA legislation and a consultation forum was held. In 2019 a report on the consultation process was published at the same time as a set of legislative proposals for reform of the HEA Act 1971. In July 2019, the government agreed to comprehensive reform of the 1971 Act. A further consultation process was held and then a working group was established in November 2019 to agree the objectives, scope and governance provisions of the legislation. Creation of the Department of Higher Education, Innovation and Research seems to have intensified the reform momentum. A memorandum was brought to government in December 2020 and in February 2021 a further Report was published and a consultation process undertaken. The Minister now seeks to ensure that the HEA will be provided with the necessary statutory basis for its functions. In addition to providing a robust legislative basis for the HEA, the reform proposals are aimed at putting in place legislation which ensures robust governance and accountability structures and processes within HEIs and which reflects national and international standards. According to the *2021 Report on Legislative Reform*, such structures and processes are expected to provide for maximum performance of HEIs and the achievement of societal objectives for higher education. A key element of the reform is the plan to create ‘more streamlined, competency based governing authorities’ (DFHRIS, 2021: 11). This is the issue which concerns elected councillors because of their long involvement in the governing bodies of Irish universities.

4. Councillor Involvement in Governing Authorities

4.1 Historical Background

Since the creation of the National University of Ireland in 1908, locally elected councillors have had statutory involvement in the governing authorities of UCD, UCC and NUIG. During negotiations leading up to the passing of the Universities Act of 1908 there were debates about the range of representatives to be included in the governing bodies of the proposed colleges. Not surprisingly, developments in Ireland were influenced by what had occurred in England during the late nineteenth century. During the Industrial Revolution, a number of English universities had been established which emphasised practical knowledge over academic knowledge in order to meet to meet the emerging scientific, technical, industrial, commercial and professional needs of a changing society. These ‘red-brick universities’ were deliberately linked to the civic authorities in their region/locality and local authority members were included in their governance structures.

The Dublin Commission, which was created to establish the National University of Ireland, was influenced by developments in England⁵ and was conscious of the requirement for an educational infrastructure which would respond to Ireland’s need for graduates equipped to lead the country’s much-needed development. Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century there were robust debates about the structure and the focus of the nascent university. Debates took place in the House of Commons and the House of Lords about the religious ethos, the disciplinary orientation and the governance structures of the proposed national university. The ‘university question’ was widely contested in other arenas also with many publications and editorials on the topic. A strongly nationalist focus was advocated by people such as John Dillon, Patrick Pearse and Douglas Hyde. Resolution of the issues was reached in the 1908 Universities Act which created the National University of Ireland, consisting initially of University College Cork (the former Queen’s College), University College Dublin (previously a Jesuit university) and University College Galway (the former Queen’s College)

⁵ See McCartney, 1999

Reflecting both emulation of the English redbrick system and the wish for political and religious compromise, the new institution's governance was formally linked to the embryonic local government system. In order to ensure that the National University was 'under popular control' (T M Kettle) and could be regarded as an 'extremely democratic university' (John Dillon)⁶, the Governing Body included representation from county councils. Proposals for such linkage had emerged during the earlier debates and received mixed reaction. In 1904, Patrick Pearse wrote an editorial in *An Claidheamh Soluis* advocating representation of the hierarchy, the county councils and the graduates on the governing structure of any new national university⁷. Earlier, in evidence to the Robertson Commission, Douglas Hyde stated that the Gaelic League believed the 'popular element' should be represented on the governing body either through the League or the county councils. Lord Dunraven, who had served as an elected councillor, also supported the idea of council representation. Accordingly, council representation was enshrined in the NUI Charters.

There were, however, differences in how council representatives were nominated to the constituent colleges. In the debates, the Cork and Galway constituent colleges were regarded as provincial so their governing structures were expected to represent the people of the provinces. There was pressure for UCD to be regarded as a national institution, a sort of counterweight to Trinity College, so it was advocated that council representatives to UCD be nominated by a national body, not by individual councils. McCartney outlines the various iterations which resulted in the UCD Charter stating simply that eight members of the Governing Body of UCD were to be elected by the General Council of County Councils. Since its creation, the AILG has continued that function. A different formulation was put in place for UCC and UCG with the individual councils in each province electing members to the respective Governing Bodies.

During the lead-up to the Universities Act of 1997, attempts were made to curb the number of councillors on governing bodies. Debates took place in both the Dáil and Seanad during 1996 and 1997 and a campaign was undertaken by the General Council of County Councils

⁶ Cited in McCartney, 1999

⁷ See Walsh 2014

(AILG's predecessor) to retain the status quo⁸. Cross-party support was expressed for retaining the number of councillors. The relevant clause was removed during the University Bill's passage through Seanad Éireann when an amendment proposing the retention of the existing level of representation for county councillors was passed and proposals to reduce the size of governing authorities were defeated.

4.2 The current model of representation

Thus, for over a century, the AILG and its predecessors have had the right to nominate members to the governing body of UCD⁹ and each local council in the respective catchment area has nominated Councillors to the governing bodies of UCC and UCG/NUIG. Currently, the AILG has the right to nominate EIGHT persons to the Governing Authority of UCD while the Governing Bodies of University College Cork and University College Galway each include a total of SEVEN nominees (including some mayors) from local authorities within their catchment areas. The newer universities, DCU and UL, also include local elected representatives in their Governing Authorities. DCU has one Councillor member while the UL Governing Authority has the Mayor of the City and County and the Cathaoirleach of the Municipal District as members. Thus, elected councillors have long played a recognised role in university governance.

⁸ Personal communication from Mr Liam Kenny, AILG, based on 1997 files

⁹ Working Paper, February 2021, Liam Kenny, Director, AILG

5. Governing Universities in the 21st century – the aptness of councillor involvement

AILG acknowledges the key role that the higher education sector and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play in Irish society and takes particular cognisance of their contribution to social, economic and cultural development at national and local levels. Figure 1 encapsulates the link between higher education and many policy spheres.

Figure 1 Higher Education at the centre of a complex policy eco-system



Source: Hazelkorn and Locke (2020)

As a national representative body for county councillors, **AILG believes its members have a vital role to play in facilitating the connection between higher education and the public that it serves.** The Association welcomes the Minister’s commitment to ‘the elevation of higher education and research to a central and more visible position at local and national level’¹⁰. In order to achieve this aim it is important that a clear link be retained between the system of local government and the governance of higher education. This link is important for a number of reasons, among them the significance attached to joined-up governance; the need for

¹⁰ Update on legislative reform of the Higher Education Authority Act, February, 2021

synchronisation of national/regional/local development; the contribution that Councillors make and the positional legitimacy, qualities, experience and diversity which Councillors bring to the role.

5.1 Joined-up governance

In order to boost the effectiveness, efficiency, speed and coherence of government, Ireland like many other countries has adopted the language and practices of joined-up government. Successive *Programmes for Government* and a myriad of government documents advocate joined-up approaches to achieve integration and co-ordination in different policy spheres. For example, Enterprise Ireland's Regional Plan (2019) seeks to foster engagement between each region's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), SMEs and innovative start-ups. The *Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* calls for 'a broader 'whole of government' coordination of higher education'¹¹. The recently published *Statement of Strategy 2021-2023* for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science has as one of its goals, cross-governmental collaboration. There is also awareness of the need to enhance engagement between higher education institutions and local authorities and to collaborate in developing shared solutions to local and regional needs¹². Public consultation has become the norm in policy making in Ireland as evidenced by the 27 open consultations listed on the gov.ie website in mid-March 2021. Government policies and strategies are also replete with calls to ensure the views of the public are represented in decisions regarding public resources. **Designating a place for Councillors on university governing authorities is a tangible step towards realising the aspirations towards joined-up governance.**

HEIs have an enormous influence on the regions/localities in which they are situated. An Indecon report, commissioned by the Irish Universities Association in 2019 found 'an estimated total gross economic impact of €3.96 billion' in 2017¹³. This does not take into account the earnings premium for graduates or the indirect and induced expenditure generated by universities. The Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings is an assessment designed to measure the social and economic impact of an academic institution

¹¹ *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 - Report of the Strategy Group* (2011:89)

¹² See for example, *Legislative Reform of the HEA Act Consultation report* (2019) and *Outline of the Legislative Proposals for the Reform of the HEA Act, 1971(2019)*

¹³ Indecon (2019) *Independent Assessment of the Economic and Social Impact of Irish Universities*, p 56

on society. In the 2020 rankings, 768 universities were ranked. Five of Ireland's eight universities featured in the top one hundred and the remainder were in the 100-200 category. These rankings illustrate the impact of universities on society. With thousands of students and staff in each institution, the impact on the economic, social and cultural activity in the city and region is vast. Local spend, rates income, infrastructural, accommodation and resource demands and cultural opportunities are all affected by the presence of a university in a region/city. The following examples illustrate universities' tangible and intangible impact on their regions. In 2018, UCC's Irish students generate €135 million for the local economy¹⁴. Collins et al. highlight the important role that the University College, Galway has played in the evolution of the cultural and industrial fabric of the city asserting that 'the University has played a vital role in much of that which Galway has become known for'¹⁵ **HEIs are aware of their contribution to and role in their locality and recognise the importance of involvement with local authorities.** The University of Limerick's Strategic Plan lists a number of themes on which it collaborates with local and regional authorities.

- Working with local authorities in the region, identifying opportunities to support the redevelopment of Limerick city and the broader Mid-West region
- Informing and influencing regional and national discussions through the contribution and expertise of our people
- Engagement with local councils on regional planning, for example, the proposed Special Development Zone led by Clare County Council
- Involvement in city and regional transportation planning¹⁶

Since the 2014 local government reforms, local authorities have a clear economic development function and are designated as the 'the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level'¹⁷. Thus, Councillors have a strengthened role in public spending decisions in their localities. It is prudent, therefore to include Councillors in the governance structures of such important regional entities as the HEIs. **Having elected councillors on the**

¹⁴ UCC Economic and Social Impact (2018)

¹⁵ Collins et al. (2021). Reframing development in Ireland, *European Planning Studies*, p. 21

¹⁶ UL@50 STRATEGIC PLAN 2019–2024

¹⁷ *Putting People First* (2012:1)

governing authorities, means that information can be shared, priorities aligned and collaborative advantage exploited.

6. Specific qualities which Councillors bring to the governance role

Referring to the role of county councillors in early university appointments, McCartney mentions ‘the common sense, practicality, political clout, shrewdness and business acumen they brought to their task’¹⁸. Circumstances may have changed but such qualities retain significance in governance processes. The AILG case for the retention of Councillors on HEI governing structures is reinforced by their various functional roles and also by the qualities and experience they bring.

6.1 Representing the public interest

Elected Councillors have a range of representational, regulatory and statutory duties. Being directly elected, Councillors represent the public interest and ensure that the voice of the wider community is heard at the governance table, whether in the Council chamber or on external organisations. Councillors serving on governing authorities¹⁹ highlighted the added value their connectedness with citizens and communities brings to the governing authorities and emphasised the importance of their democratic credentials and their contribution to ensuring the public accountability of the HEIs. **Thus, as members of HEI governing authorities, elected councillors act as a conduit to ensure that the issues and challenges of concern to citizens of the region are recognised and that the academic, social and economic activities of the HEIs reflect those concerns.**

6.2 Diversity of Experience & Perspective

Councillors bring their professional experience and expertise to the governing bodies. Their election by the public, through a competitive process, is an endorsement of their capabilities and their authority to act on behalf of the public. Irish society has grown in diversity in recent decades. Councillors come from a wide variety of social and geographic backgrounds and

¹⁸ McCartney, *op.cit.*, p. 38

¹⁹ Informal personal communications with author

engage daily with diverse communities. ALLG membership not only mirrors this but the daily interaction of elected councillors with citizens from a range of cultures, experiences and expectations recognises and affirms that diversity. Local elections are the only elections in which all residents may vote so Councillors' legitimacy as representatives reflects Ireland's multi-cultural society. Councillors can bring views informed by such diversity to what might be otherwise a rather socio-culturally homogenous forum. Furthermore, their diverse lay competences complement the specialisms existing in HEIs. **Many Councillors have qualifications and experiences in the spheres identified in the DES document *Appointments to University Governing Authorities*, making them eminently suitable as governing authority members.** Such qualifications and experience are and have been utilised on governing authority sub-committees in the areas of finance, diversity & equality and health and safety, for example.

Local authorities account for significant spending. The estimated Current and Capital expenditure for 2020 was approximately 8.35 billion²⁰. Adoption of each local authority's budget is a reserved function of the elected members of the local authority. From their involvement in the budget process, **Councillors bring experience of making decisions involving large amounts of public money and weighing up the implications of such decisions. Similarly, they have experience of risk-management and compliance in large organisations.** Such know-how among members adds to the effectiveness of governing authorities where many of the academic members, for example, may not have benefitted from such experiences.

6.3 Linkages with regional actors and with other tiers of education

Many of the Councillors who have, to date, served on governing bodies bring extensive **education sector experience**, having been involved in other tiers of education such as boards of management at primary and secondary levels and membership of the Education & Training Boards. They thus **help to link the various strands of education** and bring an understanding of educational issues at the various levels. They also bring their **varied professional capabilities and competences**, adding to the diversity of experience on the governing authorities.

²⁰ Local Authority Budget 2020

Their work at local and regional levels connects Councillors with influential actors in the region so **they can contribute to strengthening HEIs' regional impact by fostering linkages and creating synergies between the diverse actors**. Their **involvement in strategy development and evaluation** in various bodies gives them valuable experience and involves them in a variety of stakeholder networks involving interdependent actors from public, private and voluntary sectors. The resultant **collaborative and decision-making skills** and the **insights into regional potential and challenges** coupled with their **political awareness and astuteness** gives them a rare combination of competences which are an asset to governing authorities.

7. The proposals for legislative reforms: issues and implications

The previous Government approved an overall policy approach to the reform of the Higher Education Act, 1971 and published a set of legislative proposals in 2019. The current government has intensified the reform drive and has made some modifications to the 2019 proposals and has undertaken a further consultation process. The proposed legislation, if enacted, will significantly reduce the size of governing authorities. There is no mention of either Councillors or local authorities in either the legislative proposals document or the recent update on the reform process. The 2019 documents proposed that the number of members on governing authorities should be in the range of 10 to 15. The February 2021 document proposes that the governing authorities of HEIs will have no more than 12 members.

AILG believes that the number recommended is too small at 12 to be an adequately representative governance forum. Even in a system like Norway's where small boards have been put in place, local government involvement continues. Out of a total membership of eleven on Norwegian boards 'two external members are appointed by local or regional governments'²¹. This demonstrates Norway's valuing of democratic representation and presents Ireland with a working model.

There are several references to competency in the reform documents. The updated document states that the 'reform of the governing authorities aims to provide more effective,

²¹ de Boer & Peter Maassen (2020), p. 2049

independent, strategic, competency-based boards'²². It later advocates emphasising competency over representation in the membership of the reformed governing authorities. It does not however, define the competences which it seeks. As demonstrated earlier, elected Councillors have **a range of skills, competences and experiences appropriate to the governance of complex institutions** such as HEIs. NUI, Galway has already developed a competency matrix for its current governing authority²³. The role of Councillors within local authorities ensures they have the **professional, experiential and personal attributes** required by such matrices.

8. Conclusion

The European Universities Association asserts that universities require 'a productive relationship with public authorities and an enabling regulatory framework'²⁴. We believe the current reform proposal can achieve this but only if provision is incorporated to retain elected councillors as governing authority members. Enactment of the proposals in their current format would seriously diminish the democratic efficacy of the governing authorities, weaken the diversity of views on those bodies, fragment the networks that have been built or strengthened through Councillor involvement and limit the skill-set, experience and competences available.

AILG urges the Minister and his Oireachtas colleagues to amend the proposals and retain and legislate for the presence of elected councillors on university governing authorities.

²² *Update on legislative reform of the Higher Education Authority Act, February, 2021*, p. 12

²³ Competency Matrix for Membership of Údarás na hOllscoile 2021-2025

²⁴ European University Association (2019) *Efficiency, Effectiveness and Value for Money in our Universities*

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