

Technological universities

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Sir, – It’s hard to disagree with the sentiments expressed by Patrick Davey in his letter of [March 9th](#). The recent reinterpretation of criteria that institutes of technology should meet in order to be redesignated as technological universities does not inspire confidence, and raises new concerns about the whole enterprise.

However, I would question the accuracy of Dr Davey’s statement: “The universities express their expertise more in the fields of long-term and theoretical research as part of the enterprise to extend human knowledge on a broad front”.

In fact, there has been a substantial shift in the Irish university sector in recent years towards practical and applied knowledge, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level (note for example that the vast bulk of national funding for scientific research is firmly targeted at applied rather than fundamental science).

This “mission drift” of the universities is rarely acknowledged but it has implications for the institutes of technology.

As regards the extension of human knowledge on a broad front, I feel bound to point out that I am unaware of a single senior position in the Irish university sector in disciplines such as the history of science or the philosophy of science, in contrast with top universities such as Harvard or the University of Cambridge.

Apparently the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment are of minor interest here. – Yours, etc,

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Sir, – I fear that the new technological universities will only serve to add to the standing army of overpaid academic administrators. – Yours, etc,

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