\section*{THE ALGERIAN FRONTIER - NEW PhD}

A specially designed international PhD at the University of Limerick will help transform the way teaching and scholarship at Algerian universities is carried out. The project is funded through the future of the Algerian government to use English as the official language of teaching and learning so that the country's universities will be supported through the specially designed programme offered to the country's visiting students.

Winning a four-year contract that is estimated to be worth up to €20 million, University of Limerick has agreed to facilitate the conversion to English as a teaching medium with the Ministry of National Education (Algeria) as the country moves to increase the visibility of research in higher education institutions. Previously described as a "must to open up the international environment" for Algerian universities, a think-tank of specialists and administration officials presented proposals to the Algerian Ministry last year for promoting the use of English in teaching and research.

Dr Mairead Moriarty, Assistant Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at University of Limerick, told 10Lk the new partnership originated.

"The Algerian government are moving from teaching everything through the medium of French to the medium of English so they need to upskill all their University staff, their trainers teachers and all of the current students so they have made a significant amount of funding to do this," she says.

"It is a landmark agreement with the programme came about last summer when Professor Tewfik Soulimane, an Algerian national who is the head of chemical sciences at Bernal Institute, was asked if University of Limerick would like to bid for the contract," she says.

This is a result of a long-term collaboration of Professor Soulimane with the University of Limerick through the Erasmus+ programme.

From there, Mairead joined a UE delegation, led by Tewfik, along with Puncte Saidia, Ann Ledwith and David Tanner, who were in Algeria last November for the project.

"While we were there we had consultations and presentations to discuss all of the aspects of our bid to host the candidates, including how the programme would look, the types of support available for Algerian students and how competitive UE funding was against other Irish and UK universities," says Mairead.

"Our job now is to bring students who have completed national scholarships in Algeria to these scholarships, over to us so that they can be trained on how to teach through the medium of English while also doing a PhD at the same time," she says.

Despite this major engagement between the country of origin and University of Limerick adding that he was looking forward to the positive impact for students.

"They will be undertaking world-class research while developing their language skills and cultural knowledge in the outstanding and welcoming campus that we have here in Limerick," he explains.

The project team in UL created an international PhD with a taught component of English as a medium of instruction, which candidates will embark on three years of individual research resulting in a PhD upon completion.

"Essentially they make a national decision that they wanted to divorce themselves from the use of the French language in an educational setting because publishing their research and continuing to educate people through the medium of French keeps them out of international university rankings and therefore that really damages their reputation," says Mairead.

The project team in UL explained that it was explained to the Algerian delegation during their visit to Algeria that university staff have to have difficulty accessing funding and attracting international collaborators outside of the French-speaking world.

"We were told that they needed to start the switch and publish in English and to ensure that their education system is moved over to English quickly," she says.

"Algeria is doing this on two levels -- in third level education and in primary schools and then they will expand it in time," Mairead told 10Lk.

The first phase of the project saw 117 PhD students, the majority of whom are females, join the international PhD at the start of 2020 and in September.

"We envisage taking on more students across more disciplines in the University," she says.

At each intake, students will join a structured four-year programme with a taught course in English language proficiency and the pedagogy (training to teach) of their subject through English.

The majority of the students will see through the end.

"It is a fantastic opportunity to help shape the future development of higher education in that country," she adds.

Mairead explained that the project must be put in context in light of the Algerian economy to fully understand it.

"It is a very wealthy country in terms of resources such as gas, oil and diamonds, but it doesn't have the industry to support that. There is huge unemployment and the State basically provides everything in terms of housing, provisions and wages," she says.

"For this particular cohort, they would be unemployed and with limited opportunities to further their education if they didn't have these opportunities. Many of these students have all competed to be on this scholarship programme, we are very confident that the vast majority of the students will see it through to the end.

"This is hugely important for Algeria because the price is too high for them to complete the programme especially in terms of future prospects," she adds.

Mairead explained on completion of the international PhD, each of the Algerian students are well placed to access a lecturing post when they return home.

"From a diversity point of view, a large portion of the cohort are females, and that is a good thing," Mairead said adding that "It's females from a developing country which is in line with their Government policy to uplift women since gaining their independence from France in 1962."

While French is still used in certain educational settings such as medicine, Mairead added that the universities wish to make "a bold statement to get what they need from international markets in a broader context, Mairead cites UL's focus on the "global south as a real area of opportunity, as the emerging markets in Africa will prove to be worthwhile."

"We also have a moral responsibility to the developing world and to developing countries to reach their goals. I think we are a University of Sanctuary and the fact that we have a huge amount of projects with Irish Aid and a history of doing research that is community led is important."

"That type of work can't just be in our own local community because if you really want to be an international player, you can't just focus on what is happening in your own front yard.

"This type of contract impacts on a number of separate levels. It impacts on the individual and their professional development as they become the train the trainers. It also has an economic impact in that these students return highly trained and highly skilled meaning that their own universities will go up the rankings, so you bring them in line with the Global North."

"Also remember that the majority of the students are female and if you are putting women in that role of train the trainer, where society is traditionally male dominated, that is really a strong statement made by Government," she adds.

- Andrew Carey