

International trade talks affect Education, not just Farming, says IFUT

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The General Secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT), Mike Jennings, has called on the Minister for Education to clarify the Irish government's position on changes affecting Education to be discussed shortly at the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Proposed new rules governing international trade in education services could lead to education being effectively classified as a 'commodity' with far reaching consequences for colleges, students and teachers alike, he says.

"The WTO talks affect a wide range of vital issues, not just farming. Discussions scheduled for September include Liberalisation of Education - by encouraging privatisation, commercialisation and deregulation of public services, including education. The result may involve legal restrictions on how national governments fund and support education services.

"This development raises fundamental questions about the very ethos of education. Is our education system to be viewed as a means to give every young person the opportunity to develop his or her full potential as a person? Or will it be defined in future as a service to be sold, with our young people targeted as 'customers' and subject to marketing and sales pitches from a very young age?"

There is already evidence of transformation-by-stealth in Irish education - particularly at third-level - from a service operating for the public good to a commodity serving the interests of private profit. This is usually disguised as 'modernisation' but is already having a profound impact on how pupils and students learn and on how teachers and lecturers convey knowledge."

The Minister for Education should, therefore, clarify the Irish government's position on this issue as a matter of urgency. IFUT will be seeking to ensure that education continues to operate in the best interests of our young people and society, not for the benefit of those who see our educational institutions as a new source of business and private profit, Mike Jennings says.

ENDS

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