

**Cónaidhm Éireannach na Múinteoirí Ollscoile**

**Irish Federation of University Teachers**

**PRESS RELEASE – 18 March 2009**

**UNIVERSITY TEACHERS RESPOND TO  
FINE GAEL'S UNIVERSITY FEES PROPOSAL**

The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) welcomes the efforts by Fine Gael to find a means of dealing with the chronic underfunding of our higher education system without doing the serious damage to participation rates which the reintroduction of undergraduate fees would inevitably cause.

“Whilst Fine Gael’s proposals would require some further discussion and fine tuning, we greatly welcome the fact that they see the huge barriers which could be caused by imposing fees of thousands of euro per annum on students”, said IFUT General Secretary, Mike Jennings.

“Fine Gael is correct to draw proud attention to the huge increase in participation rates in higher education since fees were abolished”, said Mr Jennings. “However, I cannot for the life of me understand why they now propose the abandonment of our national target of 72% participation by 2013”.

“Surely if we can find a way of dealing with the underfunding of higher education without the privatisation of education, which is what fees are, then we should carry on full steam ahead to the maximum possible rates of participation”.

“Batt O’Keeffe clearly rejects the legacy of his fellow Fianna Fáil man Donogh O’Malley who proved in the case of second-level schooling that when fees are abolished not only do participation rates soar, but the entire society benefits”, said Mr Jennings.

Mr Jennings said that other aspects of Fine Gael’s higher education strategy were much more worrying and less welcome.

“The proposal to move responsibility for higher education away from the Department of Education to a new entity to be called the Department of Technology, Skills, Innovation and Higher Education betrays a mindset that continues to see the value of higher education only in the narrowest, short-term, job-training sense. Just last week, the President of one of America’s most prestigious universities, Stanford University, Dr John Hennessy, warned against the dangers of this very approach.”

If Ireland is to prosper we need two things. The first is higher levels of participation in higher education, and the second is for the higher education system itself to be well resourced and capable of seeing beyond our immediate, short-term problems.

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