

Third-level colleges face ‘financial strangulation’ by government

Joint approach needed by all who fear for sector’s viability, says IFUT General Secretary

May 12th, 2018

Universities are being financially strangled by government funding policy; if not reversed will increasingly result in inadequate education standards for students, the economy and society, Joan Donegan, General Secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has warned.

Addressing delegates at the 2018 Conference of IFUT in Dublin, Gresham hotel, today (Sat May 12), Joan Donegan proposed a joint approach to government by all those involved in third-level education to confront the financial starving of our universities.

The Conference will be addressed at 11.15am by Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O’Connor, TD. There will also be a Panel Discussion on third-level education with Jim Miley, Director, Irish Universities Association; Thomas Byrne, TD, Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Education; and University Senator, Ivana Bacik.

Joan Donegan said that “numerous statements from management in our universities, the HEA, Irish Universities Association, IBEC and others all point to the need for a new government commitment to third-level funding.

“The government has found it possible up to now to ignore our individual and varied demands for adequate funding. A joint approach based on our common demands would help to force a reversal of the disastrous funding policies of recent years,” she said.

“The stark facts are that our colleges are being financially starved and strangled, while the detailed analysis on funding contained in the 2016 Cassells Report is being ignored and shelved.

“Instead universities are expected to obtain their income from just about anywhere but the Exchequer!

“From more International Students. From Philanthropy. From developing ever more ingenious means to undermine pay and conditions. From requiring staff to devote excessive hours to bringing in research monies at the expense of teaching.

“Just recently we again heard renewed proposals for the introduction of student fees. As if all students are not currently paying 3,000 euro fees disguised by another name, which are actually among the highest in the EU.”

Education cannot be viewed as a simple commodity, to be managed as if we are dealing with a giant profit-and-loss account, Joan Donegan said.

“The last Budget exacerbated the crisis, seeking to shift the emphasis even further onto private funding, most notably through the increase in the industry levy.

“What is at stake is the very integrity of our higher education system. The government must accept that investment in knowledge is necessary and vital for the future of our young people, economy and society. It must reverse policies that have resulted in spending per head at third-level dropping below second-level since 2102.

“IFUT, therefore, is committed to developing alliances with all those who value a properly resourced higher education sector. Foresight and adaptability are essential to ensure the provision of a more effective response to this funding crisis, through co-operation with all stakeholders in the education sector. Progress can and must be built and consolidated through partnership, using all the tools and means at our disposal.

“It is time that we all worked to agree a common approach to reverse lack of funding,” Joan Donegan said.

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