

Letter to editor

Dick Ahlstrom is correct in questioning the Department's of Education and Skills proposals to alter the funding arrangements for higher education.

The recent Cassels Report on the sector revealed a continuing rapid increase in demand for third-level education with 60% of school leavers entering the system in 2015.

It is inappropriate that government policy should escalate a bias towards STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) courses, which will inevitably impact on medicine, education and other key areas. Threatening funding cuts if the entire university sector does not adopt such a bias risks quickly creating unintended consequences of dire shortages in other graduate areas.

The overall funding issue is again ignored in the latest proposals and the STEM initiatives are cost intensive.

Between 2008 and 2012 recurrent grant allocations to universities and colleges fell by 25%. Since 2012, the public spend per third-level student has remained below that for second level, with no real sign of corrective budgetary policies by the current government.

A working group comprising Revenue, the Department of Finance and third-level sector interests should immediately be established to address new mechanisms to increase state funding for our universities. As previously proposed by IFUT, making use of the Apple Corporation Tax windfall would be a good place to start the debate.

Sincerely
Joan Donegan.