

## **Letter to the Editor, Irish Times**

*January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

As Fine Gael and Labour party delegates prepare to meet for pre-election conferences later this month, the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) wishes to draw their attention to the escalating crisis in third-level education.

The next government must immediately address the devastation of underfunding and understaffing that has resulted from years of budgetary cutbacks in the sector.

Third-level education is increasingly being reduced to poor relation status in the education system, despite soaring student numbers. Under the outgoing government funding per student at third-level fell below that of second level for the first time ever.

The years 2007 to 2014 saw funding to universities slashed by 26% and to other colleges by 24%. Staff numbers declined by 4,500 from 2008 to 2013.

At the same time student numbers at third-level surged by over 31,000 (16%) from 2008 to 2014.

Increasing numbers of academic staff are being employed on temporary and highly insecure employment contracts, while research in our universities is being undermined and academic staff are being denied time to engage in research activities.

The next government must also address gender equality in staff promotions, by ensuring that universities implement the recommendations of the HEA's National Review of Gender Equality in Higher Education, chaired by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, which is due to report next June.

Finally, education should be excluded from the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would facilitate access by discredited private US colleges to Ireland, with heavy penalties imposed on the taxpayer if they are denied. The EU Foreign Affairs Council of Ministers has excluded the audiovisual sector from TTIP to preserve and promote cultural and linguistic diversity within the EU. The same reasoning justifies an exemption for education from TTIP.

The above proposals are vital to ensuring that Irish higher education has the policies and sustained investment to maintain standards and to meet growing student demand in the years ahead. The next Programme for Government is the place to begin to put things right.

Sincerely,  
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