

# What the Election 2016 Manifestos say about third-level education

## Fianna Fáil:

(xv) Freeze student fees

A particularly cynical addition to the government's list of broken promises was the increase in student fees which has inflicted great hardship on many students. In addition it placed a further burden on already stretched parents struggling to make ends meet trying to support their children's education.

– We will freeze student contribution fees at their current levels for the next five years.

(xvi) Create equality of access to 3rd and 4th level education with an increase in the Student Maintenance Grant and Student Hardship Fund

A world class education system is a key part of Ireland's economy. Central to our policy is the principle that access to a top quality education should be determined by merit and hard work, not ability to pay. We will:

– Fully retain the undergraduate maintenance grant system to support low income students who may otherwise be put off by the costs. The grant will be increased in line with the CPI at a total additional cost of €12.5m annually. In addition we will increase the Student Assistance funds to help disadvantaged students access third level at a cost of €4.7m annually.

– Review the effectiveness of access policies in higher education and ensure that the distinct needs of different groups such as people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged communities are being effectively assisted.

– Explore the roll out of an income contingent loan system to assist students and parents with costs.

(xvii) Re-introduce Post Graduate Grants

Part of building a world class education system and equipping a global workforce is a post graduate system that attracts and retains our best and brightest. The cuts to the Post Graduate support system are having a corrosive impact on the quality of the education system. In addition they freeze out low income students who have the ability but not the resources to go onto post graduate study. This will cost €53m annually.

– We will re-introduce the post-graduate grant scheme at 2010 levels and criteria.

(xviii) Raise Higher Education funding and standards

The gradual decline in the performance of our third level institutions in international comparison tables illustrates the impact of government neglect of the area. The long term repercussions of starving the sector of vital funds needed to compete globally will be felt for years to come. A strong higher education system is vital in producing high quality research and producing the skilled graduates needed to attract investment. We will:

- Increase current funding to Higher Education institutions by €100m.
- Increase capital funding via a €296 million package in research and capital investment.

Separately in a section on Research and Innovation the following is contained:

- Establish a new five year funding cycle for the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL) of €300 million for investment specially earmarked for capital investment in research facilities as well as research projects. Based on previous iterations we believe this funding pool could attract matching funding from private sources and institutions themselves of equal proportions.

(ii) Ring-fence funding for programmes in a broader range of areas

Research prioritisation was introduced by Fianna Fáil in order to ensure Ireland developed a critical mass of excellent research in strategically important areas. This approach has been successful. However, the more radical approach of this government has been to squeeze funding for all areas outside of these fields. This is causing immense damage to our research base and involves a fundamental misunderstanding of how research and innovation works. A research-intensive economy cannot exist without a broad base in primary research. In addition, genuine breakthroughs which create new industries and horizons primarily emerge from research cultures which value basic science. The new Science Strategy's commitment to this area is little more than a fig-leaf. We will:

- Ring-fence funding for the support of basic science outside of the research prioritisation areas.
- Maintain a separate budget for research in the humanities and social sciences as part of a dedicated body within the Higher Education Authority.
- Support the idea of a broad-based research capacity based on innovations driven by third-level institutions working in cooperation with each other.
- Continue the support begun under our Centres for Science Engineering and Technology for critical mass in key priority areas based on innovation from within the system and cooperation with industry.

– Publish an annual report on the balance of research funding by all principal research funding agencies.

– Ensure that capital programmes such as the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions are linked to overall strategic development goals in higher education.

## **Fine Gael:**

More Taxpayer Support for Higher Education:

Fine Gael is committed to addressing the funding gap for the higher education sector. Just to stand still, the sector requires €100m of additional funding to provide for the growing number of Students going on to higher level education and Fine Gael is committed to providing this out of exchequer resources.

In addition, we are committed to providing 150m in additional capital resources for facilities, as outlined in the 2016-2021 Capital Plan, including the €40m that has been committed to the Grangegorman DIT project.

Following the publication of the Expert Group report, Fine Gael will outline a complete funding plan for the higher Education sector.

A More Efficient Higher Education Sector:

Fine Gael will ensure that additional funding for the higher level education sector will be conditional on continued reforms of the sector that cut out waste and unnecessary costs, encourage more income generation by the sector in collaboration with the private sector and address identified national challenges and skills shortages.

Online Higher Education:

Online learning can open up higher education opportunities to more students and reduce costs.

Fine Gael will commence an extensive consultation exercise to consider how this can be accomplished in a way

Which does not compromise standards.

“Earned Autonomy” for universities:

We will give universities new freedoms – within strict budgets and new accountability systems – to set their own

staffing needs, hire the best lecturers, automate routine processes and adapt work practices to local staff and student needs.

The Government will, within 6 months, publish a substantially revised Universities Bill that will free from central

Government human resource controls those universities that demonstrate a sustained commitment to cost efficiency, performance accountability and pay transparency.

**Flexible Learning:**

Some third level institutions do not offer part-time courses to learners as part of their full-time day provision.

We want to address this anomaly and offer learners the opportunity to attend courses part time, evening, summer and weekends.

**Preparing Students for the Workforce:**

We support the introduction mid-degree “sandwich year” courses, whereby students spend their third year of university working for an Irish business.

Such courses have been shown to significantly increase a student’s job prospects, post-graduation.

**Technological universities:**

Fine Gael continues to support the creation of Technological Universities, which will be linked to industry and will have an enormous

Impact on our capacity to create and retain jobs in regions.

We will prioritise those institutions with clear ambitions and plans for the furthering of industry-relevant technological research and Education.

## **Green Party:**

Higher Education

2.8.1.

Investment

Increased funding is needed to cope with projected increased demand. Funding per student in Irish higher education is 30 per cent below UK levels (Economic and Social Research Institute, A Study of Future Demand for Higher Education in Ireland, 2012).

Thus, the higher education system is providing good value for money. However, more money is needed, since that report also estimates that the number of students joining third level will increase in the next decade, and there are areas where improving the quality of the educational provision needs further investment. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (“Hunt report”) highlights that projected numbers of new entrants will rise to almost 50,000 students in 2015, and to almost 65,000 in 2025. Expensive fees in

most of the UK will further accelerate the decline in the number of Irish students studying in the UK, while increasing pressure of UK students seeking to study in Ireland. Substantial additional funding will be needed just to keep up with the predicted growth in enrolment.

### 2.8.2.

#### Third Level Entry

The Irish Universities Association has stated that, contrary to the often stated opinion that the leaving certificate is currently fair, that it “promotes significant inequity through the capacity of the more advantaged to game the system.”

Our objective is to transform third level entry so that the competitive points race is greatly diminished, allowing deeper second level learning to occur with less emphasis on exam technique. We will do this in three ways.

1. The various changes proposed by the Irish Universities Association to reform entry will be piloted in third level colleges and results of these pilot studies will inform further changes to entry. In addition to the proposals they suggested, we will investigate whether more specific matching of examined subjects to chosen courses would allow better matching of skills to courses, as is common in the UK and other education systems, which suffer less from the points race phenomenon, since the interchangeability of points across subjects creates a false sense in students’ minds that very different learning experiences are somehow equal.
- (2) Third level entry reform will markedly increase the proportion of students entering by non standard routes.
- (3) We will channel entry into fewer more generalist courses, enabling students to make decisions after entry into college, and to compete at college level for places on courses with more highly restricted numbers. Thus, students will complete an initial general course semester or year at third level prior to entering into highly competitive courses, with progress to the more competitive courses dependent on third level assessment within the colleges themselves. This alternative approach is intended to improve course choices for students and allow better selection of appropriate students, applying third level selection criteria for third level courses.

### 2.8.3.

#### Greater Student Mobility

We will reform funding models to benefit student access and mobility. In essence, under this approach, the state funding follows the student, not the institution. We will structure and invest in the Further Education sector

We will reform both the Further Education and Third Level sectors to allow greater mobility between relevant courses, so that a student starting after school in a local college may naturally transition at a later stage to carry forward credits to a more specialised centre elsewhere. The current HEA

approach of trying to engineer strategic alliances among nearby Irish institutions offers little benefit to the students in those institutions, and may simply add layers of bureaucracy. Instead, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) should negotiate with third level institutes to set and monitor yearly targets for increased mobility, as judged by students transferring courses, and by students taking modules in other institutions.

This pressure for improved mobility within the Irish third level system will prepare it to take an active part in the complex future of world class higher education, involving active international strategic alliances and collaborations between institutions.

2.8.4.

Increase in PhD Graduates.

PhD level research helps drive innovation and economic growth. Companies are attracted to countries that invest in this level of training

The proportion of those educated to PhD level in Ireland is only at OECD average, well below that of Germany.

We will increase the proportion of the research budget to support quality training at research MSc and PhD levels, with a goal of increasing the number of graduating PhDs in 2020 by 20% versus 2012 levels. We will set more ambitious targets for third level institutes in attracting EU and other non exchequer research funding to Ireland, with greater supports for third level institutes that succeed in this. We will revise company tax incentives to ensure that a greater proportion of the tax credits for research currently benefiting Irish industry are going into increased research training of company staff. This will include graduate research MSc and PhD level training. This will upskill the research capabilities of the Irish workforce and will improve Ireland's long term competitiveness.

2.8.5.

Online Education to Expand Education as an Export.

We will build on the economic return of building a strong third level sector attracting students from abroad. Particular emphasis will be on developing distance learning/blended learning approaches that showcase our educational skills via elearning platforms that attract new students worldwide. This investment will bring new teaching jobs into Ireland that brings income into the country. It will also attract international students to spend periods of study in Ireland. To develop this, we will strategically grow the range and quality of courses relying on computer delivered "elearning".

Online learning (e-learning) is creating a revolution in how people worldwide are gaining new skills and qualifications. We need to strongly position Ireland in this sector, building on our English language environment and educational track record. We will:

Review the long term development of elearning in Universities, Institutes of Technology and further Education Centres.

Invest in and promote a greater number and variety of Irish third level elearning courses  
Build Ireland's brand reputation for elearning and "blended" elearning/ traditional learning, by regularly assessing course quality.

Promote Irish elearning offerings abroad using combined marketing teams from different colleges.

## **Independent Alliance:**

We believe in equal access for all to health and education.

## **Labour:**

In the 1990s, Labour convened a National Convention on Education, to get the views of everyone involved

in education and set out an agreed agenda for reform and investment. That Convention led to the drafting of the

Education Act which has governed our school sector since 1998.

We believe that now is the right time to repeat that exercise. Within 100 days of taking office, we will establish a

new National Convention on Education, to report within 12 months on the long-term priorities for

reform and investment in the education sector.

We value the opportunities which college provides. But not every young person wants to go to college, and a

well-functioning economy requires people with a variety of skills and experience....

We will complete a review of all PLC courses in the first half of 2016, and begin reforming the sector to ensure

that further education and training opportunities are available all year round.

College provides young people with incredible opportunities. No young person should miss out on those

opportunities because of an inability to pay. In government, we have protected and enhanced the student hardship fund.

We remain committed to ensuring that cost is not a barrier for entry to third-level education.

We established an expert group to advise on future funding of higher education. We will take four immediate actions to begin to address higher education funding. We recognise that it must be made more affordable, and that we need to invest in a system that can give the quality opportunities our young people deserve. Our spending plans for the next five years include increased demographic funding of €15m each year so that the rising numbers of students don't lead to a reduction in quality. In 2017, we will reduce the student contribution by €500, replacing this element of the student contribution with state funding. We will provide an initial €25m to third-level institutions to improve staff-student ratios.

These actions will be taken pending the publication of the options to be presented by the Expert Group on Higher Education Funding, which will require a national discussion to find a solution that provides the necessary funding to the sector without reducing accessibility or leaving the next generation of students with an enormous debt burden to shoulder.

We will provide an additional €10m per year to provide emergency funding to students in need, and to better support students with disabilities. Eligibility for student grants will be assessed using the same means test that applies for social welfare payments. All colleges will be required to allow students to pay their student contribution by monthly direct debit, with no charge levied on this option. Income thresholds for student grants will be index-linked so that the value of these grants is not eroded by inflation. We will provide a new €60m fund to support postgraduate students.

## **People Before Profit:**

### **Further and Higher Education including Vocational Education and Training**

1. State funding to Irish further and higher education needs to return to pre-crisis levels  
Abolition of registration fees and expanding the student grants and Back to Education scheme;
2. Reversal of the commercialisation of our education system;

3.

Research for the public good will be undertaken by our third level institutions, not restricted by corporate control;

4.

The opportunity to return to education to develop skills and to learn new skills is available to all;

5.

Further and higher education will be based on peoples' needs and aspirations and the curriculum and programmes available must reflect this;

6.

Investment in the vocational educational sector to expand apprenticeship opportunities ensuring the needs and aspirations of all are provided for and the country will have a skilled workforce, replacing that lost to emigration or retraining following the economic crisis

## **Renua Ireland:**

### **15.6 Universities and Institutes of Technology**

Universities in Ireland are underfunded. The cuts to the funding of universities have resulted in their international rankings plummeting since the start of the financial crisis. Attending a third level institution is not simply a rite of passage. It should also deliver outcomes for students that have demonstrable utility in the marketplace where graduates will ultimately seek employment. RENUA Ireland believes there needs to be changes to the funding model for third level institutions, in line with the research focus of Institutes of Technology (ITs).

#### **15.6.1 Funding model**

The State has limited capacity to fund all its priorities. International averages show the college graduates typically earn in excess of 40% more over the course of their careers than people who do not go to college. Currently however, many people who do not go to college subsidise those that do.

RENUA Ireland believes that young adults should be provided with access to a loans system so that they can afford to meet the true economic cost of properly funded third level courses.

Our system of student loans would require students to start repaying them once the salaries they earn exceed a certain threshold – likely to be in the region of €25,000 per annum.

A condition of introducing these loans will be linking any inflation to the CPI. Colleges will be tasked with enhancing their own fundraising efforts to obtain funding in excess of this new income stream.

A second feature of this system will be ring fencing the existing funding so that a meaningful system of access scholarships can be provided for people from low income households.

Cost: neutral

### **15.6.2 Lecturing, research and academic freedom**

RENUA Ireland strongly supports academic freedom. This means that academics should be provided with the freedom to pursue their research without corporatist interests being allowed to silence them or curtail their work.

RENUA Ireland commits to providing for academic freedom in contracts of employment in Ireland.

RENUA Ireland also believes that it is unrealistic and unnecessary to force all educators in the third level sector to become academic researchers. There are third level educators who love teaching but who have little interest in research and vice versa.

The salary and job descriptions in colleges and universities should be changed to reflect this. Researchers who attract significant income streams should not be required to undertake extensive lecturing commitments if it harms their college's capacity to become a leader in a given field. Lecturers who enjoy teaching should be facilitated in doing so. We believe these changes have the capacity to improve the way staffing and research occurs in third level institutions

Cost neutral

### **15.6.3 Research focus and funding for Institutes of Technology**

The Institutes of Technology lack a specific, specialised focus for research purposes. RENUA Ireland is in favour of allowing ITs to bid for research roles so that they can become a central part of an eco-system of research and industry partnership across the country. Limerick IT and Blanchardstown IT have research interests in dairy and in horticulture. This concept should be extended, more finely honed and aligned with start-up incentives and business development programmes. In parallel with this, ITs will retain a key role in providing valued and valuable courses in a mixture of practical and academic disciplines across the State.

Cost: neutral

### **15.6.4 Students and third level**

Students are not always best served by the course options they are provided with. RENUA Ireland favours increased specialisation by colleges in full-time courses offered by Institutes of Technology, in preference to the unnecessary balkanisation of what should be broad-based, generalist courses.

As some of this has been driven by a desire to manipulate the CAO points system, RENUA Ireland wants to put the emphasis back on the benefits gained by students from taking such courses. RENUA Ireland envisages

- Larger, more general third level courses;
- Less duplication of courses across the university and IT sector;
- Focus being placed back on the benefits gained by the students rather than the colleges.

#### **15.6.5 Access to third level for People with Disabilities**

The HEA in conjunction with the CAO will be tasked with setting up an entry system into third level education for people with disabilities who wish to follow a non-traditional route towards further training or education such as modular assessments over a longer time frame

Cost neutral.

## **Sinn Féin:**

Education is dealt with as a single section, the following are the third-level references:

They (FG and Lab) have increased student fees and removed many support grants, forcing many third-level students to drop out and leave their courses.

Many teachers in third level are employed in low-pay, insecure positions.

Moves are being made to progressively increase the role of corporate interests in third-level institutions.

- We will invest additional funds to tackle staffing shortages at third-level, including Institutes of Technology
- We will extend funding supports for people with disabilities in third-level education to part-time students to make education more accessible

## **Social Democrats:**

THIRD LEVEL:

- Capping and then reducing the Student Contribution Charge to the level of the Dutch system (€1.9-€2K) in the lifetime of the next Government;

- Reforming the maintenance grants scheme, to provide better tapering of supports;
- Investing in access programmes, building on existing successes, to ensure broad sociodemographic representation across the third level system;
- Restoring maintenance grants for postgraduate students;
- Progressively increase funding to achieve EU average funding levels;
- Improving the level of autonomy of colleges, together with accountability for results – a programme of modernisation that must be developed in partnership with the third level sector;
- Creating new apprenticeships and advanced qualifications.