

## **Universities must work for good of society not just business, says new campaign.**

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A campaign to highlight the increasing efforts to redefine our universities as ‘businesses’ rather than centres of research, study and learning has been launched, with the initial support of over 700 lecturers and academics across all seven Irish universities.

The campaign, that was launched in Dublin today (Mon. Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>), is based around a 10 point Charter, which highlights the Irish university as a public good, not a private profit-making institution. It mirrors similar ‘Defend the University’ campaign internationally.

Launching the campaign Jens Vraa-Jensen (Denmark), Chairperson of the European Standing Committee for Higher Education, Education International, said that universities must be guaranteed sufficient autonomy, funding and freedom to search for deeper truths than just solutions to the latest contemporary crisis.

“We must not be forced to conform to the instrumental or short-term interests of business or government, which can subsequently be changed for expedient reasons,” he said.

‘Defend the University’ supported by the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) and SIPTU, which represent academic staff in Irish universities, says there is now widespread consensus across the educational and political worlds that the Irish university is in a deep crisis, spokespersons for the campaign, Mike Jennings (IFUT) and Ronnie Munck (SIPTU) state:

“This crisis is often diagnosed as one of finances alone. While the continuous bleeding of funding for education is a most serious cause of concern, there is an even deeper crisis of perspectives, a failure of the imagination and a rush towards marketisation and managerialism.

“This will destroy Irish higher education as a source of new ideas and understanding of our society, if not reversed.

“The basic question is whether the university is run according to the business logic of a profit-making enterprise - or maintained and developed as a public service with a social accountability model and logic.

“While university research is largely paid for by the public purse, universities are now increasingly becoming a research back-up for the private sector, in non-transparent partnerships where the private/public divide is blurred.

“The consequences for our students, society and indeed the Irish economy are incalculable,” Mike Jennings and Ronnie Munck state.

The 'Defend the University' campaign has published a 10 point Charter. Its main points include:

- Corporations or business interests should not dictate teaching or research agendas.
- Teaching must be about the dissemination of knowledge and fostering of creativity, not just increasing 'human capital.' Research must be focussed on creation of new knowledge, not just enhancing the profits of corporations.
- Students are the lifeblood of the university, not consumers or generators of 'customer satisfaction' indices. Staff are entitled to a dignified and collegial workplace free of arbitrary degradation of working conditions.

The campaign aims to start a debate on the future of Irish universities. Over the coming months this will involve:

- Organising a series of discussions at university level to promote a widespread understanding among lecturers, students, parents and the wider community of the campaign
- Engaging with the Minister and Department of Education on the key issues that threaten the future of the university and seeking a new policy direction
- Supporting the increasing demands internationally to defend the university and prevent it becoming a simple vehicle for the needs of specific business interests.

"It is incredible that those in universities with the most expertise – the academics and lecturers who deliver courses and information on a daily basis – are being increasingly and deliberately excluded for any participation in the development of the university," Mike Jennings and Ronnie Munck say.

Full details of the campaign can be viewed on:

[\*\*Defend The Irish University | A Charter for Action\*\*](#)

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