

Government and HEA 'disregarding' third level, says IFUT

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The Department of Education and HEA are disregarding the needs of academics, researchers and students alike in pursuing enforced 'solutions' to the funding crisis in third level colleges, Mike Jennings, General Secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) said at the organisation's Annual Conference in Dublin (Sat. May 10th, 2014).

"The simple, stark, depressing and dispiriting reality is that the people who see themselves as charged with controlling and directing us simply do not respect us.

“When was the last time you heard the Minister for Education or the HEA express concern that the staff : student ratio in our colleges has gone through the roof or through the floor, depending on how you wish to describe it.

"It has deteriorated from 1:18.7 in 2008/'09 to 1:20.9 in 2009/'10 to 1:24 in 2010/'11 and continues to deteriorate, but the Minister and his Department seem oblivious.

"The HEA, which used to see its role as being a bridge between the civil servants of Marlborough St and those working in academia has 'gone native' and now sees its job as an enforcer of increasingly remotely conceived 'solutions'. These 'solutions,' such as the Initial Teacher Education Review Body Report, are frequently promulgated and enforced without anyone bothering to identify what the problem requiring a solution was in the first place.

"Do they actually believe that it is the same to give a lecture to 50 students as to 100 or 150? Do they believe that 150 assessments can be carried out in the same time or with the staff numbers as you did 50?

"You cannot do the same proportion of tutorials or small group teaching sessions. You cannot assist 150% more students experiencing educational, social or emotional difficulties.

"You cannot devote the necessary attention to the atypical student, the ones from abroad, of atypical age, or those from disadvantaged areas whose backgrounds give them little cultural familiarity with higher education.”

Mike Jennings said that the scientific evidence has been there for years that senior academics work an average of 50 hours per week and junior academics work an average of 47 hours.

“Yet in Haddington Road they ask us to work 78 hours more per year while at the same time proclaiming that no one who works 39 hours or more per week is expected to put in more time!

“Over and over and over again we also hear Ministers, Junior Ministers and other worthies talking about our national priority, 'the enhancement of research'.

"Let me use plain language. This talk is pure bunkum. It is pure hypocrisy when you say you value research but

- force staff in one of our finest Research Institutes in Tyndall up to accept 30% less than their equivalent colleagues in UCC.
- say you value research when NUIG tells the Labour Court that not a single Researcher in Higher Education is entitled to the job security clause of the Haddington Road Agreement.
- another university actually boasts that there is not a single full-time Researcher on a permanent contract on its books.!"

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