

Time to challenge the ‘myth of austerity’ - IFUT President, Rose Malone, at IFUT Conference, May 9, 2015

Issued May 8th, 2015

IFUT sees the funding of the universities as a fundamental issue of social justice and educational equity, Rose Malone stated in her Presidential Address to the Conference of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT), in Dublin Saturday, May 9th, 2015.

Ms Malone said that it is necessary to challenge the myth of the ‘inevitability of austerity.’ This myth is used as a justification for ever continuing cuts in funding of third level education - thus affecting students, staff, facilities and thereby threatening the very fabric of our third level system

“Austerity talk is an example of neo-liberal discourse in its purest form and the associated distorting effect on language. ‘Reform’ used to mean making things better, not destroying the public sphere. Many things done in the name of ‘Rationalisation’ have little rationality outside of what are often very narrow economic objectives, if even that..

“The 2011 Hunt Report on Higher Education notes that 85% of the funding of Irish HE is public funding and that this has declined as a result of the cuts. The OECD (2009) notes that investment per student has declined.

“At the same time participation rates are surging.

“This has serious implications for the reduction of inequality. We learn very clearly from experience at primary and secondary levels that equity demands greater spend per student to enable real participation by non-traditional groups.

“It is worth pointing out again that 100% of young people in households headed by a higher professional and 89% of those from farming families make the transition to third-level. The figure drops to 50% for skilled manual households, 33% for semi or unskilled and just 27% for non-manual.

“As Higher Education has become the ‘norm’, those still excluded from it are at an even greater relative disadvantage than was the case when very few progressed. At the same time, participation in higher education by older adults (25-64), at 7%, is the second-lowest in the EU.

“The most gratuitously offensive proposal in the Haddington Road talks was the one that required an extra 78 hours per year from academics.

“The response of IFUT, and ICTU on behalf of trade unions generally, to economic collapse was to look for an appropriate balance between taxation and spending in addressing the very real crisis which was not of our making as trade union members,” Rose Malone said.

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