

News Release - Union of Students in Ireland

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NEW COALITION CALLS FOR BIGGER EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION TO HIGHER EDUCATION COSTS

The four biggest trade unions in higher education have joined with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) to campaign for better public investment in the sector. USI, IFUT, IMPACT, SIPTU and TUI announced their new coalition as they published joint proposals on higher education funding as part of Minister Richard Bruton's public consultation on an education strategy for 2016-2018.

In their submission, the five organisations call for phased increases in public investment, coupled with an increased employers' contribution to the costs of public higher education, which they say could be achieved through a ring-fenced increase in the training fund levy. They say a higher contribution from industry, which is one of the main beneficiaries of the public education system, is justified because Irish levels of employer social insurance are amongst the lowest in the OECD.

The coalition says it is vehemently opposed to income contingent student loans, which are believed to be among the options being considered by Government.

Between them the five organisations represent students, academics, and non-academic staff. They also call for the immediate publication of the Cassells Group's report on the future funding of higher education in order to facilitate proper consultation with stakeholders, and a full public and political debate on the funding challenges and options.

The submission explores a range of issues that confront the people who work and study in the sector, including access, affordability, casualisation of staff, the impact of underfunding on quality, demographic demand pressures, and the lack of postgraduate supports.

USI President Kevin Donoghue said: "We sought to establish this coalition because we recognise the significant challenges that lie ahead for higher education. We have the same objectives in terms of funding and are committed to a system that properly supports our staff and students. Collaboration between the major stakeholders in education is crucial to our success."

IMPACT Organiser Joe O'Connor said: "The main representatives of those who use and provide higher education are united in their support for a well-funded system, which is free at the point of use, and which does not burden young people with huge debt as they enter the world of work. We are committed to working together to advocate and campaign for significant public investment in higher education and a fair contribution from employers, who are among the biggest beneficiaries of the excellence in our higher education system."

"It is neither over the top nor hyperbolic to say that without an urgent injection of funds the Irish University and HE system is in danger of suffering an irreversible collapse in public trust nationally and internationally" said Mike Jennings from IFUT.

Dr Aidan Kenny Assistant General Secretary TUI stated, "There is an urgent need to change the narrative from funding of higher education for individual benefit to investment into higher education for the public good. The research suggests there is more than a threefold return on every euro invested in higher education. This benefits, the regions, business and communities."

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