

## **Irish universities face continued slide in ratings due to persistent government neglect, warns IFUT**

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has warned that the status and viability of Irish universities is being brought to breaking point following a decade of government enforced financial cutbacks and staffing cuts, combined with rapidly increasing student numbers.

Speaking in advance of the release of the 2016 International Ratings for Irish universities. IFUT General Secretary, Mike Jennings, said that Irish universities can expect ongoing undermining of their standing internationally. Current government policies must be reversed ‘beginning with the forthcoming Budget,” he said.

“While rating systems are deficient in significant ways they do indicate how our education system is monitored and evaluated worldwide.

“Government policy towards funding and staffing in the sector is the primary cause of the current malaise. Between 2007 and 2014, state funding for universities fell by 28%, from €722.8m in 2007 to €522.2m.

“This was matched by an increase in full-time enrolment in our seven universities of 18%, from 78,577 in 2008 to 93,023 in 2014.

“It is shocking to realise that student to academic staff ratios were worse in 2011 than those described in the report of the Commission on Higher Education (1967) and increased from 19.4: 1 in 2007 to 23.0: 1 in 2011.

“In addition, casualisation in university employment is further eroding confidence. In 2011 the number of university staff on research-only contracts was 4,172, not far short of the number of core academic staff (4,701),” he said.

The government’s recent Education Statement pays scant attention to university education and shows the government remains blind to the ever-expanding crisis, Mike Jennings said.

“The forthcoming Budget must address this crisis as a priority. The government must act on commitment in the Programme for Government to the implement the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015) and provide adequate funds to enable universities to recover from a decade of what now seems like deliberate neglect and downgrading of third-level education,” he said.

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