

Minister for Higher Education strongly criticised for slighting college staff on online exams

Spirit of solidarity in battling Covid-19 ignored by Minister, say IFUT

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has strongly criticised outgoing Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell-O'Connor, for her failure to acknowledge the huge contribution that lecturers and academic planners have played in developing alternative online arrangements for student examinations due to Covid-19.

Joan Donegan, General Secretary of IFUT, said that the Minister, in announcing the replacement of all practical, oral and written assessments in higher education, thanked a very wide range of bodies for efforts 'nothing short of remarkable.' Yet she pointedly refused to name those who have actually developed and will implement the new online exams and assessment models.

"Since the outbreak of Covid-19 lecturers and heads of departments have worked assiduously with college managements to develop new online examination models. There has been a very positive co-operation at all levels in our colleges between staff and management to ensure workable alternatives were quickly agreed to assess each individual college course correctly.

"Staff in all academic departments have volunteered thousands of unpaid hours to speedily develop what is, in effect, an entirely new exam assessment system. The Minister cannot but be fully aware of this fact.

"The battle against Covid-19 in our society has been characterised by a great national solidarity and community endeavour, something which has been acknowledged and strongly promoted by government.

"In addition academic and support staff in colleges literally moved mountains to deliver online teaching before colleges closed in March, many academics are lending their expertise to government agencies and the public and, overall, contributing to an entirely new approach to delivering necessary services to the campus community.

"Our lecturing and academic staff have played their full part in this endeavour, despite many being on precarious and short-term contracts and facing likely unemployment.

"The Minister's omission is all the more glaring in this context. She should immediately correct this error and slight on thousands of lecturers and academic planners.

"I would like, however, to re-iterate that IFUT and academic staff everywhere will continue to work assiduously with management in all colleges to ensure effective delivery of online exams and provide reassurance to hundreds of thousands of students that their interests remain paramount at this time," Joan Donegan said.

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