

Emergency support package required for higher education, say IFUT

“All-Stakeholder consultation needed to address looming education cliff”

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has called for the introduction of emergency supports for higher education similar to those implemented for business, combined with the establishment of an ‘all-stakeholder’ consultation process to address the education cliff around the corner.

Joan Donegan, General Secretary of IFUT, which represents approximately 3,000 lecturers and research staff countrywide, said that decisions around both funding as well as urgent non-cash issues need to be prioritised as the future of hundreds of thousands of students and thousands of staff are in jeopardy.

“On one funding issue alone, our colleges face financial ruin due to the likely collapse in foreign student intake next year. These students account for around one-tenth of the student body due to their much higher fee structures and deliver up to a third of fee income for many colleges.”

“Colleges face further major income loss from the collapse of summer course activity, extreme difficulty in obtaining new research projects and the loss of student accommodation income.”

“Without an urgent government rescue package, staff lay-offs and the collapse of course delivery may be the inevitable outcome.”

“In particular, many contract and precariously employed lecturing, tutorial and research staff on which most colleges increasingly depend, face immediate lay-off. Without these staff, colleges will be unable to deliver many courses or maintain educational standards.”

Joan Donegan said that “the Department of Education needs to facilitate a fully inclusive discussion around college resumption dates, approval of future new online or other learning models and the length and structure of the next academic year.”

“Without such inclusivity academic planning by staff will be impossible. Without clarity, many thousands of Leaving Cert students may simply opt to defer enrolment, causing further strain on the very existence of some education institutions.”

“The Australian government has announced a higher education relief package in excess of €10b. It includes supports for additional access to ‘nursing, teaching, counselling, allied health or other areas considered national priorities’ according to their Education Minister.

“We need similar innovative thinking and policies here as a matter of urgency.”

“Above all, academic staff and planners who will have to plan the roll-out of education courses in the ‘new normal’ must be at the centre of discussion and consultation.”

“The very future of our economy and society depends on educating our young people effectively at this time. Any new programme for government must also include a clear commitment to prioritise a survival plan for higher education,” Joan Donegan said.

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