

Next Government Must Prioritise Higher Education Funding to Prevent Potential Collapse of the Sector, says IFUT

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has called on political parties in any incoming government to deliver adequate funding for higher education through provision of the resources identified in the 2016 Cassells report.

IFUT General Secretary, Joan Donegan, said that “Cassells identified that an additional €600m was needed in the five years to 2021 and a further €1b in the decade to 2030 to address the funding vacuum.

“It is shocking that almost four years after this report was published the key issues remain to be addressed by government. The educational fabric is in danger of collapse if this situation is not urgently resolved.”

“This has huge implications for the student teacher ratio, for terms and conditions of employment and in escalating student hardship. It has also led to further threats to academic freedom as university managements seek to turn lecturers and researchers into part-time fundraisers to fill the funding gap created by inadequate state funding,” she said.

Specifically a new Programme for Government should:

- Commit to an immediate cash injection to higher education to compensate for underfunding since the 2016 Cassells recommendations and maintain increased funding in subsequent budgets.
- Establish a task force to tackle and eradicate precarious work practices in higher education.
- To progressively bring student to academic staff ratios in line with the OECD average.
- To protect academic freedom by ensuring that any proposed review of the HEA does not facilitate a drift towards a ‘business’ model of education.
- A phasing out of student fees in line with policy in line with most other EU countries and address the housing and accommodation crisis for students.

“With student numbers projected to continue to soar over the next five years and with our universities already sliding in international rankings, it will soon not be possible for higher education to continue to deliver the graduates needed to maintain our economy and society, unless urgent action is given priority by the next government,” Joan Donegan said.

ENDS

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