

Budget must respond to dire needs of higher education and initiatives proposed by Higher Education Minister, says IFUT

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has called for higher education to be given priority funding in next Tuesday's Budget.

Joan Donegan, General Secretary of IFUT, said that thousands of lecturers and tens of thousands of students require urgent support to cope with the impact of Covid-19, on top of a previous decade of underfunding.

"The commitment from Higher Education Minister, Simon Harris, to quickly respond to recommendations from a current EU funded study on recommendations in the 2016 Cassells report, must also receive clear and specific provision and support in the Budget."

"Specifically, Budgetary provision must be increased to deal with:

- The additional 2,500 students added on top of the normal figures enrolling annually
- Chronic understaffing resulting from a 10% decrease in staff in the decade from 2008, which was accompanied by ever increasing student numbers
- A staff to student ratio of 23:1, among the worst in the OECD
- Continued underfunding of research, exacerbated further by the impacts of Covid-19
- Lay-offs of many temporary and precariously employed lecturing and tutorial staff, as universities seek to cut budgets at any cost, straining teaching resources to a minimum."

Joan Donegan said that the 2016 Cassells Report on higher education stated in 2016 that the "funding system is simply not fit for purpose."

"The Higher Education Authority, in its own detailed report a year later, fully endorsed those conclusions.

“Since 2012 funding per third-level student has declined below that of second level, a situation that remains.”

“Urgent government decision to revive higher education is required and must be delivered as early as possible in 2021.”

“The three parties in government have committed to deliver “long-term sustainable funding” for higher-level education.”

“Budget 2021 must enable delivery on this commitment, support the initiative of the new Minister for Higher Education, and respond to the glaring crisis in our colleges.”

“Continued delivery of highly qualified graduates and researchers from our colleges must be guaranteed, to ensure that these graduates contribute to and remain one of the key factors driving economic and social development as we emerge from the pandemic,” Joan Donegan said.

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