

Higher education focus in Budget welcome but sector must be included in new Recovery Fund to ensure sustainability, says IFUT

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The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has welcomed the allocation of €3.3b. to higher education in today's Budget, but "after a decade of neglect, the sector must be included centrally in the government's Recovery Fund next year to allow a return to sustainable education," Joan Donegan, General Secretary of IFUT said.

"The announcement of 5,000 additional student places and additional 'springboard' places is a major recognition of the vital role the sector plays in economic and social development and the need to expand access further. However this cannot be delivered in a context of fewer and restricted staffing numbers in our colleges."

"The reduction announced in the pupil:teacher ratio in schools must be mirrored by recruitment of additional lecturers in higher education, where the ratio is now one of the worst in the OECD."

In his Budget speech, Minister Michael McGrath described higher education as 'pivotal' to our society and economy and to attracting investment and job creation.

IFUT will, therefore, be proposing that the sector be fully included in the development of the government's new Recovery Fund, where the emphasis on 'reskilling and retraining' must include those enrolling in college to obtain essential expertise in health, ICT, education and other key areas linked to economic and social recovery. Minister Paschal Donohoe stated today that this Fund will be 'flexible in its design', which will greatly facilitate discussions."

"We must, for example, address the continued underfunding of research, exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 and on

reversing lay-offs of many temporary and precariously employed lecturing and tutorial staff in recent months," Joan Donegan said.

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