

## **Safety, Consultation and Resources key to sustainable higher education reopening, says IFUT**

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Ongoing detailed consultation by university managements with staff and students on safety and resource provision is essential to guarantee a sustainable re-opening of higher education, The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has stated following issuing of Leaving Certificate results to students.

Joan Donegan said that for college management, staff and students alike, higher education learning will be a significantly ‘different place’ this year.

“Detailed guidelines on social distancing, combined with new demands and methodologies around online learning and tutorials all require considerable attention to ensure that third-level gives students the best educational experience possible. In that context it is vital that college managements at all levels continue to consult and make decisions based on the practical challenges in the new learning environment as experienced by staff and students,” Joan Donegan said.

She said that three key areas must be prioritised as we prepare to resume higher education:

- mechanisms to quickly address health and safety issues that may arise for vulnerable or at-risk staff and students
- dedicated provision of adequate and, where required, new resources and supports to assist staff and students to quickly adopt and assimilate online learning modalities.
- retention or reemployment of staff being made redundant from short-term, precarious contracts, to ensure sufficiency of teaching capacity.

“In addition the new Department of Higher Education and Research must be adequately resourced, either in the forthcoming Budget or by other central Exchequer means, to enable universities to deliver on the above priorities.”

“Ireland, for example, lags behind the US and many EU member states in digital resources for online learning. This must be addressed as a matter of urgency, with colleges resourced directly by government to ensure adequacy is achieved for the current academic year.

IFUT is also aware of significant numbers of short-term, precarious lecturing and education staff that have had contracts terminated as colleges struggle to balance their budgets. This is a false economy that seriously threatens to undermine academic standards. Higher education institutions must be funded by central government to retain sufficient staffing numbers,” Joan Donegan said.

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