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**An Coiste um Oideachas, Breisoideachas agus
Ardoideachas, Taighde, Nuálaíocht agus Eolaíocht**
Maoiniú an Ard-Oideachais sa Todhchaí

Lúil 2022

**Joint Committee on Education, Further and
Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**
The Future Funding of Higher Education

July 2022

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CATHAOIRLEACH'S FOREWORD



The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science recognised that Higher Education in Ireland has been one of the cornerstones that has led to the development of a modern, progressive country with a highly educated work force.

Higher Education will continue to play a fundamentally important role in providing opportunities for all our citizens to learn and excel in education and training at different stages in their lives. In tandem, it will continue to act as a catalyst for economic and social growth.

I strongly believe that human talent in the broadest sense will be a key to the future development and prosperity of Ireland. Higher Education will be one of the keys that unlocks that potential and enables Ireland to engage in research and innovation to the highest levels on the international stage.

To that end, the Joint Committee identified the *Future Funding of Higher Education* as a key priority issue.

The Joint Committee agreed to produce a report having identified the following key areas:

1. Future Funding Model for Higher Education
2. Future Expansion of the Technological Universities
3. Future Expansion of Craft Apprenticeships and New Generation Apprenticeships
4. Access, Diversity and Inclusion to include Digital Learning and Student Grant Support
5. Life-Long Learning, Progression Pathways and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to support staff
6. Research, Innovation and Engagement
7. Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports

The Committee sought and received written submissions from a wide range of stakeholders.

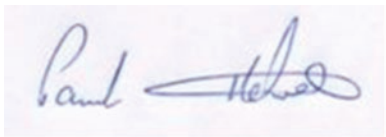
The Committee met with crucial stakeholders including relevant academics, Higher Education Management Bodies, Government Agencies, relevant Trade Unions, Mental Health Support Organisations and Student Counselling Representative Bodies; Chairs of the new Technological Universities (TU)s and Craft and New Generation Apprentices.

Mr. Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science also briefed the Committee on his plans to increase funding and where it will be targeted.

As a result of this, the Committee examined the evidence heard and the submissions received and drew up this Report containing concrete and feasible recommendations.

On 5th July 2022, the report was agreed to be published by the Committee.

The Joint Committee also requests that the issues raised in this report be the subject of a debate in both Houses of the Oireachtas.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Kehoe', is shown on a light blue background.

Paul Kehoe T.D.,

Cathaoirleach,

**Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,
Innovation and Science.**

5 July 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is widely accepted that there needs to be a significant increase in the funding of Higher Education. Ireland's spending on Higher Education is still considerably less than most other EU and OECD countries.

The objective of this Report is to examine the future funding of Higher Education arising from the publication in 2016 of the Report entitled '*Investing in National Ambition: a Strategy for Funding Higher Education*' (Cassells Report) and the EU Commission sponsored '*Economic Review of the Cassells Report*', published in 2021.

A Reformed Funding System is urgently required. It should ensure that funding allocations are based on the number of students enrolled in a Higher Education Institution (HEI); provide Core Funding/Base Funding for each HEI on a multi-annual basis from the Exchequer with increased contributions from employers through the National Training Fund (NTF). There should also be Ring Fenced Funding for individual HEIs as necessary.

The current funding model divide of 60/40 in favour of the Traditional Universities is neither fair nor sustainable. The Technological Universities (TUs) are new institutions that do not have the established reputations and pipelines of funding that the traditional Universities have and require ring-fenced funding to enable them to achieve their full potential. To this end, the State needs to move towards a European model of funding where tertiary education is viewed as a State Asset and funded primarily by the Exchequer.

Legislation must be enacted to allow the TUs to borrow money so they can provide student accommodation, upgrade physical infrastructure and expand research and development capacity. In addition, an *Expert Working Group on Developing Human Talent in TUs* must be established urgently and report back within a tight time frame.

Craft and New Generation Apprenticeships will be critical to Ireland's economic future. Higher Education Authority (HEA) funding is urgently required by the TUs to ensure there is sufficient physical space and lecturer capacity to deliver education and training to the highest international standards.

Access, Inclusion and Diversity must be centre stage in all future policy proposals on funding reform. One of the greatest barriers are high living costs and specifically, accommodation, food and transport costs. To this end, an *Emergency Task Force on Student Accommodation* should be established. The SUSI grant scheme also needs to be radically reformed to ensure that all citizens can participate equally in higher education.

An *Expert Working Group on Pathways from Further Education to Higher Education* should also be established to eradicate current barriers to progression and establish links between both sectors that allow for more seamless progression.

More than ever, Ireland must keep its place on the International Research stage. It is imperative that Irish Universities ensure that their research staff have employment contracts that offer security of tenure, career progression pathways and salary scales that are commensurate with their qualifications and experience.

Promoting positive mental health must be of paramount importance in higher education. All HEIs should be designated as Places of Sanctuary and actively support student health and well-being with a specific focus on vulnerable groups including displaced students seeking refuge in this country.

The other recommendations include:

- Ring-fenced funding for applied research and related areas in TUs.
- Appropriate financial supports for apprentices.
- Financial supports to employers to facilitate hiring apprentices from minority groups.
- A review of the National Training Fund (NTF).
- Funding for eligible Students attending Higher Education Institutes through SUSI grants and other State student supports.

- Review of the ACCESS and DARE Schemes.
- Ring-fenced funding for independent research.
- A Peer-based Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme for all HEIs.
- Ring-fenced funding for the expansion of student counselling services.

TEN KEY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the Ten Key Report Recommendations, listed by order in which they appear in the main body of the Report. They are all of equal value.

1. The current funding divide of 60/40 in favour of the traditional Universities, is neither fair nor sustainable. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should develop a new Model by mid 2023, to include:
 - Funding allocations based on the number of students enrolled in a Higher Education Institution (HEI).
 - Core/Base Funding for each HEI on a multi-annual basis from the Exchequer with increased contributions from Employers through the National Training Fund (NTF).
 - Ring Fenced Funding, as required, for individual HEIs with positive discrimination towards Technological Universities who have been in receipt of lesser funding to date. Models of funding with accountable measures across all HEIs for excellence in teaching, learning & research with additional supports as required for TUs. Also to support equality, diversity, inclusion at third level.
2. While Philanthropic and Private Funding should be supported, the State should move towards a European Model where tertiary education is viewed as a State Asset and funded primarily by the Exchequer. Future Funding of Higher Education should be based on the principle that it is a right for all citizens and a key investment in the future. The accessibility to further and

higher education is crucial for all age groups and flexible options to support part-time or online courses for lifelong learners.

3. The current inability of Technological Universities (TU)s to borrow money on the financial markets is both unfair and unsustainable and puts them at a clear disadvantage. The enabling legislation should be enacted by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) so that borrowing can commence by end of 2022. The borrowing capacity could be used for a wide range of purposes including student housing, infrastructure and research and development expansion.
4. *An Expert Working Group on Human Talent in the Technological Universities* should be established by the Higher Education Authority. The Group should be chaired by an External Expert and be comprised of Senior Department and Higher Education Authority (HEA) Officials, Irish Universities Association (IUA), Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), Senior TU Human Resources staff, Industry Representatives and Staff Unions, Exchequer & Non-Exchequer funding agency representatives, international best practice experts. The Group would examine, *inter alia*, academic employment contracts, employment conditions and recruitment and retention policies.
5. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should provide ring fenced funding to the Technological Universities (TU)s, as necessary, to ensure there is sufficient physical capacity and lecturer capability to deliver on the increased numbers of Craft and New Generation Apprentices. To this end:
 - The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Emergency should provide Short Term Funding to bridge the gap.
 - From 2023, the Department should provide Multi Annual Funding through a new Apprenticeship Fund.

- The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should commence a Review of the Craft and New Generation Apprenticeship Building Requirements by Q3, 2022, with the aim of delivering the buildings required to ensure Apprentices are educated to the highest international standards within a 3-year period.
- 6. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should initiate a Review of the SUSI grant system with a view to introducing a Reformed System by end of 2022. This should include, *inter alia*, cost of living assessment, the need to take all financial means and assets into account, awarding grants where most needed and full transparency.
- 7. An *Emergency Task Force on Student Accommodation* should be established by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. It should comprise Senior Officials from the relevant Government Departments, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Housing Finance Agency.
- 8. An *Expert Working Group on Pathways from Further Education to Higher Education* should be established by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Group should be chaired by an External Expert and be comprised of Senior Department and Higher Education Authority (HEA) Officials, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), SOLAS, Industry Representatives and Staff Unions. The Group should identify current opportunities and barriers to progression from Further to Higher Education and establish how to develop links between both sectors that allow for more seamless progression. To also review the opportunity to develop follow-on

qualifications from QQI Level 5 in each course sector onto Higher Education courses.

9. The issues of Staffing Levels and Precarious Employment in both the traditional and Technological Universities need to be reviewed urgently or by end of 2022 at the latest, by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, in liaison with the Universities. Staffing Levels have not increased in line with extra students, courses and increased services provided by Third Level Institutes and, so, there needs to be an analysis / workforce plan of staffing requirements to restore staff levels. In addition, the Employment Control Framework is completely arbitrary and needs to be abolished. The aim must be to ensure there are sufficient staff at all grades to deal with the projected increase of students, extra courses and increased services. Regarding Precarious Employment, the Review should include an examination of Hourly Paid Academic Contracts, Researchers, Postgraduate Workers and outsourcing of Support staff roles.
10. All Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s should be designated as Colleges of Sanctuary by University of Sanctuary Ireland, that actively support student health and well being with a specific focus on vulnerable groups, including displaced students, seeking refuge in this country.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1. In its submission, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) noted that *‘education can bring significant benefits to society, not only through higher employment opportunities and income but also via enhanced skills, improved social status and access to networks. By fully recognising the power of education, policy makers could better address diverse societal challenges. Data show that adults who have attained higher levels of education are generally more likely than those with lower levels of educational attainment to report stronger civic engagement, in terms of voting, volunteering, political interest, and interpersonal trust.’*¹

2. In its submission, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) commented, *‘the function of our further and higher education system is to provide genuine equity of access. A 2019 Higher Education Authority (HEA) study that revealed how children from affluent areas were 10 times more likely to score high CAO points than those from poorer areas and thereby better placed to secure more financially rewarding careers.’*² The ICTU stated that the *‘longer-term impact of the pandemic could further entrench inequality across the educational spectrum. Therefore, official policy must act to remove all barriers and impediments to greater participation and access, at all levels of the system. The further and higher education sector can play a key, progressive role in this process. But this can only occur if the critical issue of funding is resolved in a manner that is sustainable over the longer-term and works to maximise educational opportunity and participation for all.’*

3. The ICTU continued *‘investment in tertiary education is even more significant where an economy is at the forefront of technological development, and more investment is associated with greater levels of growth in these economies.’*³ It is well-established that the expansion of higher education was a significant

¹ [Economic Indicators in Focus, OECD 2013](#)

² [Higher Education Authority Annual Report 2019](#)

³ [Exploiting States’ Mistakes to Identify the Causal Impact of Higher Education on Growth \(Aghion, Boustan, Hoxby and Vandenbussche, 2005\)](#)

contributor to economic development in Ireland.⁴ Thus, given the major challenges we face, intensive, innovation-driven growth will assume ever more significance over time.'

4. In its submission, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) noted *'the pivotal role of universities was clearly evident throughout the Covid-19 crisis. The advanced skills and research knowledge in our third-level system underpinned much of the response both nationally and across the globe. The importance of our talent pool and of our research and innovation capacity has never been more evident. As we now seek to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic, our universities have an equally important role to play.*

The workplace, already undergoing significant change, has seen the pace of that change accelerated by the pandemic. The demand for high-skills jobs and the importance of knowledge and innovation across the economy has never been more evident. The broad sweep of adjustments arising from climate change are no less significant. The continued growth in our population with an extra 1 million estimated to be added by 2040 will result in a continued rise in demand for education and skills. The planned expansion in our public services from healthcare and social care through to the broad range of support services will further grow the skills demand. As we emerge from the pandemic, the university sector is ready and willing to partner with government and to play a key role in Ireland's response to the challenges ahead.'

5. Furthermore, the IUA noted *'much of the reinvestment in the [higher education] sector since 2016 has been absorbed by 'stand still' requirements such as providing for salary increases to existing staff under national pay agreements and the cost of additional student places. Other resources have been targeted or ring-fenced for specific new activities and has done little to*

⁴ [We need to talk about Higher Education \(Delaney and Healy, 2014\)](#)

address the underlying core funding deficit. A sustainable, multi-annual programme of investment will enable the third level sector to bring student-staff ratios, now well below our competitors, into line with EU averages and underpin quality provision of Irish higher education.'

6. In its submission, Enterprise Ireland (EI) opined *'it is critical that decisions in relation to Future Funding for Higher Education are informed by evidence-based skills data. It is key that funding is channeled to priority interventions to address identified current and future skills needs. Clear skills identification that addresses regional and national skills gaps will facilitate the development of partnerships and skills interventions between industry, key stakeholders, and the Higher Education system. Direct engagement with Irish enterprises is critical for an agile and responsive Higher Education System, supported by clear pathways of enterprise engagement.'*

7. In its submission, Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) proposed *'it is imperative that there is consistency between policy aspirations outside and within higher education in Ireland and the funding made available to higher education. There must be alignment, for instance, between Ireland 2040, the national development plan, and funding for higher education. There must also be alignment between the aspirations with regard to access to education, to a significant expansion of apprentice provision, to non-traditional learner provision growth including lifelong learning, to equality and diversity and the funding made available. WIT shares the State's ambitions, but it must be funded appropriately in order to realise them.'*

8. In oral evidence, on 22 March 2022, Professor Mark Rogers, Registrar and Vice President of Academic Affairs, University College Dublin (UCD) stated *'this idea that upwards of 60% of the jobs of the future have not even been thought of yet is an important argument about the need for education. It is not skills-based education; it is about the broader critical thinking capacity to adapt, innovate and change direction and do all the new jobs that we cannot imagine yet. It is very important that we do not try to predict the future. We*

will not get it right. As a result, we must be careful to make sure that we create a highly educated and competent student body that is adaptable and flexible and can take on the challenges ahead.'

9. In oral evidence, 22 February 2022, Mr. Jim Miley, CEO, IUA, made the point that *'high-skilled jobs, centred on talent and innovation, will underpin our future economic, social and cultural development. As a nation, we face a range of challenges in the areas of climate change, housing, healthcare and social services and balanced regional development. The higher education and research system will provide the bedrock of talent and innovation to meet those challenges. The need for a sustainable funding model for the sector, repeatedly emphasised by this committee, must now be delivered if the potential of the sector is to be fully realised.'*
10. In oral evidence, on 8 March 2022, Mr. Martin Marjoram, President, Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) stated *'the European University Association (EUA), has reported that public funding of third level education in Ireland, as a percentage of GDP, fell a shocking 62% between 2009 and 2019. In the same timeframe, student numbers rose by 28% and staff numbers fell by 8%. The Central Statistics Office, CSO, has found that between 2007 and 2016, real expenditure per student at third level education decreased by more than 34% in nine years.'*
11. In oral evidence, on 22 March 2022, Ms Bríd Horan, Chair, Dublin City University (DCU) Governing Authority stated *'I believe the committee's main focus should be on core and capital funding levels for ongoing costs and essential infrastructure. This basic funding has been diluted by a number of factors, including the severe funding cuts following the financial crisis over ten years ago and the dramatic increase in student numbers. That increase was entirely foreseen, given demographic trends, and was projected in the Cassells report. That increase is projected to continue until 2030. In spite of the increase in student numbers, staff numbers have been controlled throughout the period. The staff to student ratio, which is widely recognised*

measure of quality, has increased in Ireland, leaving us well behind other countries. In 2019, the average staff to student ratio in both OECD and EU countries was 15:1 while in Ireland, it was 23:1, which is a dramatic difference.'

CHAPTER 2 – FUTURE FUNDING MODEL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

12. In its submission, IDA Ireland noted investment in training and upskilling of people and in innovation in all its forms, can have potentially transformative impacts to drive productivity enhancements, *‘which will be more important than ever as embracing new technologies and business models becomes a competitive necessity for the future viability of MNCs manufacturing and services operations in Ireland. The availability of a highly skilled, agile workforce is vital to Ireland’s ability to attract foreign direct investment. To continue to attract high value, high skilled industries and grow and sustain existing MNCs, ensuring the Irish workforce have the skills and knowledge relevant to our manufacturing and services sectors of strength that drive the modern global economy is essential.’*

13. The IUA reported *‘while the demands on government expenditure are undoubtedly formidable, the value of investing in higher education is clear as demonstrated in the 2019 report by Indecon International Economic Consultants ‘Delivering for Ireland - An Impact Assessment of Irish Universities’⁵. That report showed an annual €9 billion contribution to the economy by the then seven universities represented by the IUA, a huge return for the State’s annual spending of €1 billion. In other words, investing in higher education is not just a public good, it also provides a long-term return on investment for the State.’*

14. The IUA continued *‘there is now universal acceptance on the need to increase higher education funding. Government, opposition parties, students and third-level colleges have all agreed that the system is under-funded. The long-awaited government response to the future funding of higher education must be ambitious, sustainable and reflect the realities of the current challenges facing the sector. Despite the significant growth in student*

⁵ [Delivering-for-Ireland_An-Impact-Assessment-of-Irish-Universities-2019-04.04.19.pdf \(iua.ie\)](#)

numbers, investment in higher education has not correspondingly followed. In fact, for much of the period, the growth in student numbers coincided with reduced state investment in higher education. As a result, state grant funding per student fell from €8,943 in 2008 to €5,614 in 2021 a reduction of over 37%.’

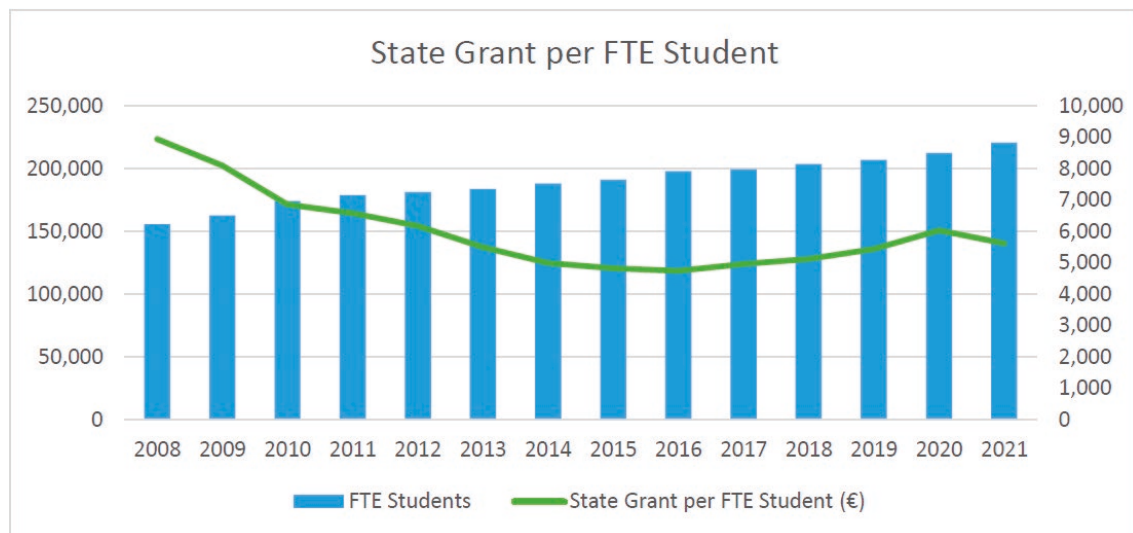


Figure 1 Graph showing the number of students in full-time education vs the state grant per FTE student (€).
Source: Irish Universities Association

15. Furthermore, the IUA noted ‘despite some reinvestment in the sector since 2016, Ireland’s spend on higher education continues to lag behind EU and OECD countries. Based on the OECD’s 2021 Education at a Glance data, total public expenditure on tertiary education as a proportion of GDP (or GNI* in the case of Ireland) is 0.6% as opposed to an OECD and EU 22 average of 1.0%. This puts Ireland joint second last in OECD league tables, some distance behind other smaller nations such as Norway (1.8%), Austria (1.6%), Denmark (1.5%) and Finland (1.5%).’

16. In its submission, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) stated ‘whilst the relationship between funding and quality is not linear, broad effects can be seen. For example, in 2015, QQI commissioned an external expert to analyse the published quality review reports of academic departments, schools and

programmes in the universities and institutes of technology. The resulting report, Quality in an Era of Diminishing Resources Report (2016)⁶ found that reduced funding, coupled with the Employment Control Framework and increases in student numbers, impacted areas of staffing (reduced numbers, increased workload), reduced promotion and staff development opportunities, and increasing tension between time spent on teaching and on research. It also impacted the quality of the teaching and learning offering, and environment (facilities, equipment, IT infrastructure and library resources).'

17. QQI's *Quality in Irish Higher Education 2020*⁷, an amalgamation of 20 annual institutional quality assurance reports from the public higher education institutions and the National University of Ireland, shows '*financial constraints remained a concern across the sector, with reference in several reports to the difficulties caused by reduced funding from the state.*' For example, one submission pointed out that a reduced capacity to make improvements to physical resources has led to a corresponding reduction in the space available to students.

18. The ICTU noted '*a 2019 study from the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) concluded that: "Across all Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded institutions, the PBO estimates that funding per undergraduate student (full-time, part-time, remote and FETAC) enrolled in 2019 was 50% lower than in 2008."*⁸ In addition, the funding shortfall has contributed to a worsening of employment conditions and a rise in precarious work. According to the CSO, one in eight workers in the education sector were on temporary contracts in 1998, increasing to one in seven in 2017. Research by TASC (Think Tank for Action on Social Change) and NERI (the Nevin Economic Research Institute) also strongly suggests that the problem of precarious employment is at its most acute in the higher education sector.'

⁶ [Quality in an Era of Diminishing Resources Report \(FINAL March 2016\).pdf \(qqi.ie\)](#)

⁷ [QQI Insights Quality in Irish Higher Education 2020.pdf](#)

⁸ [An Overview of Tertiary Education Funding in Ireland \(Parliamentary Budgetary Office, 2019\)](#)

19. The ICTU also opined *‘poor employment standards and working conditions will also impact negatively on longer-term research and innovation and contribute to a worsening of global rankings.’*
20. In its submission, the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) noted *‘across the Universities, Academics are determining their research preferences based on the availability of external funding, as securing research funding is a weighty consideration for decisions about tenure, permanency or promotion.’*
21. EI opined *‘funding decisions should be aligned with performance monitoring, evaluation of programme delivery and detailed data on education outcomes, particularly those that relate to economic outcomes for the students and for employers. A clear, transparent value for money analysis considering return to the State, students and employers should be at the forefront of any decisions related to additional funding from whatever source.’*
22. Furthermore, EI proposed *‘fluid funding models rather than rigid fixed funding models, which would allow for flexibility to address changes in the marketplace, responsiveness to future skills needs, demographic challenges and student demand. This would also allow for opportunities for more partnerships across enterprises and stakeholders regionally, nationally, and internationally. The funding models must have a balanced approach to allocating resources between core and targeted new strands and should be transparent in terms of where the funding is allocated and prioritised. Institutions should be responsive, agile, and flexible to respond to current and future skills needs.’*
23. In oral evidence, on 29 March 2022, Mr. Tony Donohoe, Policy Advisor, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) stated *‘the impact of the funding shortfall is most plainly seen in the declining performance of Ireland’s universities in international rankings. Thirteen years ago, there were two Irish universities in the top 100, with one in the top 50. Today no institutions are in*

the top 100. Rankings are selective measurements and, in themselves, do not represent a full picture of the quality and diversity of higher education. However, whatever about their limitations, they cannot be ignored. They can have an impact on the ability of Irish HEIs to attract international students, academic talent, research partners and benefactors. From a business perspective, they also have the potential to damage our reputation with international investors.'

24. In oral evidence, on 29 March 2022, Dr. Ciarán Seoighe, Deputy Director General, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) stated *'we need to understand what skills are required so that we can then deliver against those skills. A recent example of the way we did this is the SFI centres for research training. We understood there was a big demand for data analytics skills. There was a view at one point that the demand was so high in the industry sector that we would never even get the PhD students but we developed these models to create industry-ready PhD graduates and they were in such demand that we were massively oversubscribed. The thinking is to try to understand what skills will be required in the years to come because developing those skills takes time. Working backwards, if we need a particular skill set in the marketplace at scale by 2030, we would have to start that planning process almost now. The roadmap is important because we are a small country and we need to be focused and targeted. It is about understanding where those skills gaps are and where the real impact will be and then targeting the programmes accordingly.'*

25. In oral evidence, on 29 March 2022, Mr. Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME) warned if *'funding is not addressed then Unis will have to prioritise 'low-hanging fruit' of international students or precarious work etc. over prioritising learning. If a Minister is to propose the removal of a funding stream, it needs to be said upfront how it will be replaced. Please avoid doing the populist thing. We have done it before and we did not get any result out of it. If there is no return made by the user of a very valuable education service, the problems the committee has*

heard about from the teaching and learning side will get worse because universities will prioritise the low-hanging fruits of foreign students, student accommodation and so on instead of learning.'

FUTURE FUNDING OPTIONS

26. The Cassells Report was commissioned by the Minister for Education in 2014 to *'identify and consider issues related to the long-term sustainable funding of higher education in Ireland and to identify funding options for the future.'*⁹
27. The Report was critical of the existing funding structures, noted the falling rate of investment per student, legacy effects resulting from underinvestment during the financial crisis and the unsustainable financial position of the sector.
28. It recommended *'Ireland must substantially increase the level of investment in higher education to ensure that the system is able to deliver fully on its role in supporting national economic and social development. This investment must be linked to enhanced quality and verification of outcomes.'* It is estimated that the higher education sector requires an increase in annual investment on 2015 levels by €600 million by 2021, and by €1 billion by 2030, to maintain and improve standards in the sector while meeting increased student demand. These estimates are based on a targeted student-to-staff ratio of 14:1.¹⁰
29. The Report proposed three funding options for consideration. These options vary the share between public and private funding. The three funding options are:

⁹ [The Expert Group On Future Funding For Higher Education \(2016\), Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education, March 2016.](#)

¹⁰ *Ibid* [An Overview of Tertiary Education Funding in Ireland \(Parliamentary Budgetary Office, 2019\)](#)

- **Option One:** A predominately state-funded system (abolition of undergraduate fees, substantial increase in State funding relative to current levels).
- **Option Two:** Increased State funding with continuing student fees.
- **Option Three:** Increased State funding with the deferred payment of fees through a system of income-contingent loans. In addition to the above, an extra capital investment of €5.5 billion by 2030 was highlighted as necessary to *‘sufficiently cater for increased student numbers, capital upgrades, health and safety issues, equipment renewal and ongoing maintenance.’*¹¹

30. In oral evidence, on 22 March 2022, Dr. Aedín Doris, Department of Economics, Maynooth University, stated *‘the Cassells report concluded that the 2016 level of higher education funding was unsustainable and called for increased core funding of €600 million per year, rising to €1 billion per year by 2030. Although funding has increased in recent budgets, so have student numbers, meaning that spending per student has not improved. Reports suggest that the European Commission’s analysis of the Cassells review, which remains unpublished, indicates that between €350 million and €400 million in additional core funding is needed annually, a lower figure than the €600 million indicated in the Cassells report, but nevertheless substantial.’*

31. Dr Doris continued *‘although a fully taxpayer-funded system may seem attractive because it provides access to education at no upfront cost to the student, it is ultimately the most regressive option as it entails the biggest transfer of resources from those who have not benefited from a higher education, the lower paid, to those who have, the better paid. Moreover, this option would entail a continued heavy reliance on tax revenue for any future investment in the sector.’*

¹¹ *Ibid* [The Expert Group On Future Funding For Higher Education \(2016\). Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education, March 2016.](#)

Option 2, combining increased State support with upfront fees, as at present, alleviates some of the public cost in the short- and long-term. However, upfront costs raise concerns about affordability and accessibility. Although about half of higher education students do not pay fees because they are covered by a fees grant, some of those who do not qualify have incomes close to the qualification threshold and struggle with both fee and maintenance costs. This is particularly true for families with more than one student in higher education at a time. Many parents borrow at commercial rates to cover these upfront costs.

The purpose of an ICL system is to remove such concerns while also sharing the burden of financing higher education in an efficient and equitable manner. ICL repayments, which are automatically deducted from the graduate's pay cheque on the basis of monthly earnings, are low or zero for low earners and increase as earnings increase, so they are designed to be affordable. Income-contingent debt is, therefore, unlike other forms of debt.

Although ICLs would eliminate fee-related upfront costs completely, it is my understanding that these have been ruled out by the Minister. Reports indicate that a reduction in the €3,000 student fee and possibly its eventual elimination has been proposed instead. Option 1, therefore, appears to be the preferred one. As mentioned, this is a regressive proposal and implies even greater Exchequer funding into the future.'

32. Dr. Doris then stated *'I will speak about option 1 first, which is no fees and full public funding. It is regressive because, basically, what that mean is that it is not free; it comes from the taxpayer, and taxpayers are made up of lots of people, including low-income individuals who have had no opportunity or who have not gone to university. It is their taxes, as well as the taxes of the better off, that are going to fund an education system that they have never benefitted from, so in that sense it is regressive. All taxes are being used to fund higher education, which is an unusual good from an economic point of view. It is both a public and a private good in economic terms. What that means is that the*

public sector derives significant benefit. As Professor Rogers mentioned, the return on investment at a public level is substantial, but it is also substantial at a private level. The return on a higher education is substantial to the individual. Because people are paid more, they pay more taxes, but that does not fully compensate for it.

From an economic point of view, it makes sense that the cost should be shared by both the individual private beneficiary and by the State. Even the most libertarian economist in the world would not argue that it should be privately funded. Nobody would argue that. If you try to fund a higher education system entirely privately, you get substantial underfunding and inadequate access. It is not an efficient way to do things, so it makes sense for there to be a substantial public sector investment. Option 3 in the Cassells report, the income-contingent loan system, and option 2 both involve both private and public contributions. They are preferable from an economic point of view.'

33. Mr. Tony Donohoe stated *'we are not saying it should be totally students. This should be, as I said earlier, a three-legged stool. It should be the State because it benefits, students because they benefit, and businesses because they benefit. If we rely on one leg, the stool will fall over. We can debate the balance of contributions and get into the design of the system, but the principle should remain that the State, the individual and business contribute.'*

34. Mr. Donohoe continued *'a US academic, Heckman, said if you want to get the biggest bang for your buck in terms of investment in human capital, you put it into early childhood education and development and set the foundations for later in life. It is about targeted interventions. Those who can afford to pay for higher education should pay. We need to make our choices a bit better.'*

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE AND PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

35. Mr Jim Miley expressed the view *'on the philanthropy issue, the one point I would make on that is that some of our members have done reasonably well*

on philanthropy funding and continue to try to push that, but it is very difficult. It does not come easy. It requires a lot of upfront investment from the institution to equip itself to be able to do it. There are tax instruments that need to be looked at by the State. Various proposals have been put forward to Government in this regard over the years. That huge sums of money are given to schools, colleges and various other causes in the US and elsewhere is not all because of the goodness of heart of citizens or wealthy people. It is because the tax structures incentivise it. We need to look seriously at upweighting our tax structures in that regard here.'

36. Professor Rogers stated *'we also have a large cohort of alumni continuously giving small amounts of money. Much of that funding is used to support students in financial need and to give scholarships. A great deal of it, to the tune of several million euro each year in my institution, is going to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. We also have some philanthropic donations that sponsor professorships or chairs. We are extraordinarily careful to ensure such funding is not reflected in the academic programmes or in academic delivery. Academic freedom is an essential component of the university and higher education system. In addition, there is also occasional funding of a programme, or at least of students in a programme, which would be quite targeted and not in the same vein. It would be about supporting an industry partner in respect of its training needs within its industry, rather than being focused on creating a broader profile of education in support of that industry.'*

37. In oral evidence, on 8 March 2022, Mr. Karl Byrne, Chairman, ICTU, stated *'ICTU did a report that shows nearly 50% of money is now from the private sector. There has been a huge drop in public funding from what it used to be. It was close to 80% or 90% previously.'*

INCOME-CONTINGENT LOANS

38. In oral evidence, 22 February 2022, Professor Diarmuid Hegarty, President, Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) stated *'I think it [income-contingent loans] is eminently sensible, but the reality of the matter is that student loans are politically toxic. I believe it is right. Deputy Conway-Walsh was worried about the €27,000 people would have to repay after leaving university. That same person will probably borrow up to €400,000 as a mortgage on a house. In that context, a €27,000 student loan to be repaid is very small. We are not talking about the hundreds of thousands paid in the UK, so I think there is a lack of balance here. The idea that the loan does not become repayable until an income threshold has been reached is very fair. In the event of redundancy, unemployment or whatever else, the student loan should not be repayable during that period. It is workable. I proposed in my paper that we should have not a student loan system as a substitute but that there should be a student loan system through a not-for-profit entity providing loans at no more than 4% such that it is not designed to enrich the coffers of financial institutions but, rather, provides the additional funds people need to survive third level.'*

39. Dr. Doris opined *'I understand [the] Deputy's concern about the debt associated with income-contingent loans being daunting. We probably should not call it debt, because it is not debt in any kind of normal sense. You only repay it if you have the wherewithal to repay it. In every income-contingent loan system in the world, there are people who do not fully repay their debt and some people who do not repay any of their debt because they have fallen on unfortunate circumstances, for example, they are unemployed or they have a disabled child they need to take care of. All of those things are taken into account. All the evidence is that what affects people's decision to participate in higher education are upfront costs. At the moment, people are incurring debt to go to higher education. However, it is not an income-contingent debt. Their parents are basically taking out the loans. They are taking them out at commercial rates, especially if they have more than one*

kid in college at the same time. We are talking about really substantial repayments that have no income-contingent element to them.

The case we always look at when we look at income-contingent loans is the UK, which is the country closest to us that have them. It is also the country that makes the biggest mess of them. The problem with the UK is not that the loans are income contingent; it is the fees are so high. Because the fees are so high, the loans amount to a graduate tax. Most people will be repaying them for their whole working lives, because they accumulate so much debt over their working lives. They charge extremely high fees. They increased fees from £3,000 to £6,000; I think was the first jump they made, although I could be wrong about that. They made substantial jumps to get up to £9,000 from the initial £3,000. Yet, there was no change in access by the lower socioeconomic classes that people had been worried about. The reason for that was that people understood that the fees would be repaid in the future and they are not upfront costs. As well as this, they would only be repaid if they could afford to repay them. Therefore, a striking aspect of the research on this is that it did not put people off going to college.

A reasonable income-contingent loan system is in Australia. It was the first one and it has been ongoing for years. There has been much research on access there and it has had no impact. Fluctuations in the fees have had no impact on access by lower socioeconomic class students. There is therefore much evidence that income-contingent loans do not affect access negatively, whereas upfront costs do. The situation we have at the moment is that we have a lot of upfront costs. We have the €3,000 fee for approximately half of the student population. We have the costs of attendance, which are inadequately covered by the SUSI grant and which need to be topped up. That seems to me to be worse than the income-contingent alternative’.

40. Ms Horan stated *‘if the structured approach that was outlined under the income-contingent loans was investigated in depth, that would have possible attractions. The sector itself reacted negatively to it, but that was following*

political and student reaction to it. The Cassells group was made up of representatives of the sector and there was quite a strong consensus view based on the international research and experience that income-contingent loans were equitable and manageable.

We were not suggesting that any other country's model should be copied but that a model should be developed for this country, recognising the issue, for example, that was mentioned by Deputy Ó Cathasaigh around emigration, and all of that should be built into the model to make it workable for this country.'

41. In oral evidence, on 29 March 2022, Dr Emer Smyth, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) noted *'there is a very high wage premium in Ireland, despite what we have heard from our colleagues about precarity, to a third level degree. For every €1,000 someone with a leaving certificate qualification earns, a university graduate will earn €1,700. That is among people in their mid-20s to mid-30s. We know there are social returns, about which we have heard from our colleagues, and there are very high individual rates of return to investment in education. It would seem fair, given the profile of students is more advantaged than those of the second level student population, that they should contribute to the cost of their education and help ensure sustainability as well as equity.'*

42. In oral evidence, on 1 March 2022, Mr Tim Conlon, HEA stated *'the Deputy mentioned State, student and employer. All three benefit from the value of higher education. The State and population benefits from the quality of life we have from having an educated population and all that goes with that, but also the taxes it pays. We see a higher level of education and better life earnings and therefore, most likely, more tax paid. People make a contribution relative to their capacity to contribute. I would look at it from the other end. The challenging piece is for those students who cannot afford to access higher education and that imbalance in the system. We need to look more carefully*

at the supports in place for those who cannot access. If they cannot access, they cannot make a contribution.'

43. Mr. Donohoe commented further *'I agree that income-contingent loans are the only workable solution. They are the most equitable solution because geography is much more of a determinant than finance when it comes to whether a person chooses to go to higher education. Just over 40% of students going to third level do not pay fees, so there are other motivating factors that are deeply entrenched in the social inequalities that exist. The OECD has stated that one cannot have a sustainable funding model that predominantly relies on the state.'*

PRESERVING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

44. In oral evidence, on 1 March 2022, Dr. Anna Murphy, Senior Strategic Advisor, QQI commented *'the need, right now, to fund all higher education institutions to support and maintain academic integrity. Academic integrity concerns a commitment to, and demonstration of, honest and moral behaviour in an academic setting. It is under threat from a multi-billion-dollar, sophisticated, global industry of cheating. A sustained, multi-pronged, collaborative effort is needed to support academic integrity, tackle cheating and the global cheating industry so that we maintain the quality, integrity and reputation of Irish higher education.'*

IRISH LANGUAGE FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

45. In its submission, Gael Linn called for the *'first three weeks of the training course for primary teachers to be organized in the Gaeltacht so that they meet each other through the Irish language from the first day as it can be difficult for students to use Irish together at Easter or in the summer if they have already gotten to know each other through the English language. Additionally, the fees associated with this period should be once more abolished. It is an essential part of the course and student teachers should not have to bear such a cost.'*

46. Furthermore, Gael Linn stated that *‘all Irish language students and trainee teachers should spend additional time in the Gaeltacht and that there will be appropriate provision to ensure that there are enough teachers who are trained to teach through the Irish language.’* This was echoed by Conradh na Gaeilge and Foras na Gaeilge in their submissions.
47. Gael Linn also sought *‘additional support [to be] made available for organizations that support the provision of opportunities to use the language in the further education sector. They believe it is important to acknowledge that life-long learning and the learning of a second language are recognized as important aspects of supporting mental health.’*¹²
48. In its submission, Conradh na Gaeilge reported *‘the State should recognise that current funding for Irish language courses in higher education is very low. The number of students attending higher education courses through Irish represents 1.1% of the total number of students in higher education. To address this, Conradh na Gaeilge would like to see a target of 5% being set to increase the number of students attending Irish-medium courses or through Irish in higher education and for additional support to be provided to Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge and other universities with a presence in the Gaeltacht to ensure that they can serve the Gaeltacht community satisfactorily so that they will be able to play a role in providing graduates to meet the implications of the implementation of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2019 and the target of 20% of public sector recruits by the end of 2030 being proficient in Irish.’*
49. Conradh na Gaeilge noted *‘there is a significant shortage of appropriate training for Special Needs Assistants to operate in the Irish-medium setting. It is recommended that a FETAC level 5/6 course be developed for Special*

¹² [Healthy linguistic diet: the value of linguistic diversity and language learning across the lifespan. Thomas H Bak, Dina Mehmedbegovic, 2017](#)

Needs Assistants but that there be modules, or a complete programme, aimed at the all-Irish and Gaeltacht system.'

FUTURE FUNDING MODEL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

50. In oral evidence, on 17 May 2022, Mr. Jimmy Deenihan, Chair, Munster Technological University (MTU), stated *'first, very importantly, the 60:40 funding split between traditional universities and TUs is arbitrary and not justifiable, especially given that the actual breakdown of respective students is closer to 50:50. This perpetuates a two-tier system which is not in the best interests of students, staff or, indeed, the Irish taxpayer who funds it. Having been established, TUs now need to be empowered through appropriate funding to deliver on our goals. The budget allocations of TUs are set and static, meaning that an increase in student numbers reduces the funded income available per student. This is a disincentive to growth and the polar opposite of what is required. This can be contrasted with traditional universities, which are funded per student and thereby incentivised to grow. A new and fit-for-purpose funding model is required, and consideration should be given to multi-annual funding as part of that. Funding per postgraduate student, including PhD students, is also lower for TUs than for traditional universities, placing the TU sector and our students at a significant disadvantage in this area. The TU legislation has growth targets in respect of postgraduate output and the funding model should not inhibit those targets.'*
51. Mr Deenihan continued *'linked to the issue of funding is the ability of TUs to borrow money. Again, having been established, TUs now need to be empowered. There is a mechanism for TUs to borrow under the legislation but it is dependent on an enabling framework from the Higher Education Authority, HEA. This framework has not yet been introduced, placing TUs at another disadvantage to traditional universities, which can access financial markets and obtain funding at another level entirely. Such funding is crucial to capital development in particular, along with Government measures to make the cost of construction more affordable, and essential if TUs are to be part of the solution to the student accommodation crisis this country is facing.'*

This crisis will only worsen in coming years with the influx of refugees due to the invasion of Ukraine, for example.'

52. In oral evidence, on 17 May 2022, Ms Josephine Feehily, Chair, Technological University of the Shannon Midlands Midwest (TUS) stated '*I certainly agree that borrowing as a signal of parity of esteem, even if we never took it up, is incredibly important. Transparency around funding models and all of that is also important. I understand the reticence of the Higher Education Authority, HEA, but it is certainly now time to move on. The HEA needs a governance framework. I get that. We would be very happy to engage with a governance framework around borrowing and consider how it might be used. As a signal of intent and parity, to commence access to borrowing would be well received across the sector.'*
53. Ms Feehily expressed the view '*we need to get the funding foundations right. We need a transparent model from the HEA. I am less bothered about precisely how the money is shared out between TUs and universities, as long as it is transparently clear that there is parity of esteem. We must get the foundations right and get it into the base. Mr. Deenihan mentioned multi-annual funding. We need the certainty of multi-annual funding. We cannot commit to something if it is only going to run for one academic year, which is only nine months. That is one of the things that I am finding really hard to adjust to. Everything stops in June. I am trying to arrange meetings in July and August, and they are all looking at me as if I am mad. Nine months is just too short. We need a commitment to multi-annual funding in the base and then we would have the freedom to start thinking creatively about philanthropy, the governance around it and what it might be used for because it will have to be a one-off. It cannot be funding for pay, for example. It is complex, but it still has to be in the mix in the future.'*
54. Ms Feehily continued '*ring-fenced funding in the form of the TU transformation fund, which was mentioned by Mr. Deenihan, has been transformational. That programme is due to end and needs to be renewed for*

a further three years so there is targeted funding as well as core funding. To get back to the announcement, I was encouraged by the specific commitment in it to a strong developmental agenda for the TUs. That suggests there is at least an openness to positive discrimination, if I might put it like that, in favour of the TUs and recognising where we are coming from. That additionality piece is incredibly important from my point of view.'

NORTH-SOUTH MOBILITY

55. In oral evidence, on 17 May 2022, Professor Patrick Prendergast, Chair, South East Technological University (SETU), responded to Member's questions on North South Mobility. He noted *'North-South student mobility is a really interesting topic. Deputy Conway-Walsh is right. Half the students coming south from Northern Ireland come to Trinity, it turns out. There are traditional, historical reasons for that. It is still very few. I think only something like 2% of Trinity students are from Northern Ireland, so the percentage must be much smaller in many other institutions. Why are there so few northern students coming south? For many years we ran a programme in Trinity, when I was provost there, called the Northern Ireland engagement programme, going into secondary schools and high schools in Northern Ireland and telling them about Trinity. Many of them do not know how to apply to the CAO. It is kind of complicated because the points change every year. We understand it but they do not. Some schools welcomed us with open arms and some did not want to see us at all. It is not straightforward. Then students who would want to come south needed specific careers guidance as to how to apply to the CAO and they might not have been able to get it. Every year until Brexit, the number of students coming from Northern Ireland increased. In the year of Brexit it dropped, and that was because of fee uncertainty. The students did not know whether they would be subject to the non-EU fee. Thankfully, the Minister provided clarity on that, but every year since the number of students coming to Trinity from Northern Ireland has dropped. I guess if we look at the whole system, we will see what is happening. I have not looked into SETU's data and I must do that sometime, but I imagine there are*

handfuls of northern students, probably dropping every year. If we want to improve student mobility on the island of Ireland, we probably need a specific policy on it. We need fee certainty such that, no matter what happens, students in Northern Ireland coming south will pay only the EU fee and, likewise, students from the Republic of Ireland going north will pay only the EU fee. There should be a programme giving information to students in high schools and secondary schools in Northern Ireland about how to apply through the CAO.'

56. Ms. Feehily further remarked *'it will be really interested to see how the HEA plans to operationalise the North-South element. It is one thing, as I know, to have something in law; it is quite another to actually make it happen. One of the pieces TUS has been really active on is an organisation called the Regional University Network - European University, RUN-EU. Two students start their degrees with TUS and finish them somewhere else and vice versa, or they go for a middle year or part of a programme. There is experience there as to how trans-regional programmes involving the European Union, well supported by EU funding, operate. There is some really good material that would help operationalise the North-South element. In addition to the fees and so on, there is probably a need for courses that provide mutual recognition of qualifications. They should also allow students to do modules here and modules there and to earn microcredentials while prior learning is recognised. All of those pieces are needed and there are trans-European models that could be copied where TUS has a huge amount of really interesting experience in the last few years.'*

RECOMMENDATIONS: FUTURE FUNDING MODEL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

1. The current funding divide of 60/40 in favour of the traditional Universities, is neither fair nor sustainable. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should develop a new Model by mid 2023, to include:

- Funding allocations based on the number of students enrolled in a Higher Education Institution (HEI).
- Core/Base Funding for each HEI on a multi-annual basis from the Exchequer with increased contributions from Employers through the National Training Fund (NTF).
- Ring Fenced Funding, as required, for individual HEIs with positive discrimination towards Technological Universities who have been in receipt of lesser funding to date. Models of funding with accountable measures across all HEIs for excellence in teaching, learning & research with additional supports as required for TUs. Also, to support equality, diversity, inclusion at third level

2. While Philanthropic and Private Funding should be supported, the State should move towards a European Model where tertiary education is viewed as a State Asset and funded primarily by the Exchequer. Future Funding of Higher Education should be based on the principle that it is a right for all citizens and a key investment in the future. The accessibility to further and higher education is crucial for all age groups and flexible options to support part-time or online courses for lifelong learners.

CHAPTER 3 – FUTURE EXPANSION OF TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

57. Ms Feehily stated *‘the future of the technological university sector is bright and exciting. It is a future with incredible potential. Realising that potential is essential if the vision and intention of policymakers and legislators are to be accomplished, not just for higher education but including the vision, policies and outcomes for social and economic development in Ireland and for the competitiveness of this country. It is also essential if the expectations of the communities we serve are to be met. I include in that a very broad and diverse range of communities: students; potential students and their families; lifelong learners; work-based learners; disadvantaged communities; the business community; and others.’*

CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT

58. The THEA noted *‘there is a concentration now on inflation and the costs of living. For our students, the student accommodation challenge looms large. The increase in student numbers, including international students, is creating an unprecedented demand for suitable, affordable student accommodation which has been exacerbated by the wider societal housing need. There is no doubt that increasing the supply of on-campus purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) could relieve the pressure on the private rented market. The delays in addressing this issue over the last few years cannot continue. In fact, the opportunity to address this problem may have already passed. TUs await access to the borrowing framework and since we have sought one many years ago, the investment metrics have changed and a borrowing framework on its own may not be sufficient to enable us to develop PBSA in an economically viable manner; direct government investment may be required.’*

The THEA further stated *‘the lack of capital buildings investment is of great concern and the PPP process currently underway is found to be slow and not delivering the building stock required in the immediate future. A major capital*

fund needs to be allocated and disbursed, which has been highlighted for many years.'

59. The THEA also made the point *'in 2016 the international norms for student space ratios were between 10m² and 11m² per student; Ireland's institutions average was between 7m² and 8m² per student. Such constraints have prevented the development of effective student services and amenities, undermining the campus environment and amenities.'*
60. Furthermore, the THEA stated *'this capital deficit extends beyond the physical buildings into equipment, facilities, and IT infrastructure, including for research & innovation. There is shared determination to build our new technological universities into world-class institutions; the state needs to play its part in providing significant enhanced capital investment. Forthcoming capacity-building funding for the sector through the NRRP and an ERDF-co-funded Regional Research, Development & Innovation Integration Scheme do not include capital expenditure as an eligible cost item.'*
61. IDA Ireland stated *'Technological Universities need to be sufficiently funded if they are to attract more graduates; increase their international appeal by developing a balance between applied research and teaching; showcase Ireland's education infrastructure and complement existing Universities while establishing a clearly identifiable technological brand. It is important to ensure that the Technological Universities remain easily accessible for enterprise, with one point of contact that can signpost enterprise towards the best option to meet their specific needs immediately and into the future.'*
62. WIT emphasised *'a differential funding model between universities and Institutes of Technology cannot be sustained into the new HE landscape now that most IoTs have become universities. The differential model, amongst other things, perpetuates class and economic disparity, especially evident in the South East where the SETU will be the first university, and there is a*

need to move rapidly to an equitable and integrated model across all HE institutions.'

63. WIT further noted *'the tuition element for a university student is higher than for a student on the same programme in the IOT sector. There are different tuition rates between university and IoT sectors that cannot be sustained and should not continue now that many IoTs have become universities.'*
64. Mr Deenihan commented *'linked to the issue of funding is the ability of TUs to borrow money. Again, having been established, TUs now need to be empowered. There is a mechanism for TUs to borrow under the legislation but it is dependent on an enabling framework from the Higher Education Authority, HEA. This framework has not yet been introduced, placing TUs at another disadvantage to traditional universities, which can access financial markets and obtain funding at another level entirely. Such funding is crucial to capital development in particular, along with Government measures to make the cost of construction more affordable, and essential if TUs are to be part of the solution to the student accommodation crisis this country is facing. This crisis will only worsen in coming years with the influx of refugees due to the invasion of Ukraine, for example.'*
65. In oral evidence, on 22 March 2022, Ms Marian Duggan, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Registrar, Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, TUS, made the point *'Technological universities cannot simply be funded on the same basis as traditional universities with their well-established pipelines of philanthropy and alumni support. At a time, therefore, when higher education is under major financial pressure while trying to maintain academic standards, the pressure on technological universities is even greater. If they are not helped in their earlier stages of development, the opportunity may pass to deliver on balanced economic and regional development and access to education for all.'*

66. Ms Feehily stated *'I am talking first about institutional capacity. It includes, for example, the employment contract which Dr. Prendergast mentioned. If you start at a different place to other institutes of higher education in terms of careers and so on that is a big capacity issue. Research is done by competent qualified people. The employment arrangements militate against us. That is one capacity issue. There is an OECD report pending and I look forward to seeing it.'*

Another capacity issue relates to the physical set-up. The TUs are clearly very keen to play their part in apprenticeships, for example. That requires physical space, kit and equipment and we do not have enough of that in order to grow the apprenticeship programmes.

Therefore, there is physical capacity and then employment capacity but there is also the kind of institutional capacity. Governance needs attention. The legislative framework is changing and then there is the existing structures. It is a real step up and challenge for the executive teams to manage across regions. It is just different. You cannot see everything. New structures are needed in order to make sure that the strategy can flow down and that the learnings can flow up in terms of the way the organisation works.'

INFRASTRUCTURE

67. Ms Duggan stated the *'lack of capital buildings investment is of great concern and the public private partnership process currently under way is slow and not delivering the building stock required in the immediate future. A major capital fund must be allocated and disbursed. This capital deficit extends beyond the physical buildings into equipment, facilities and information technology infrastructure, including for research and innovation.'*

68. In oral evidence, on 22 March 2022, Mr. Tim Horgan, Head of the Faculty of Engineering and Science, MTU, stated *'from a TU perspective there are huge opportunities to work even more closely with the TU sector to evolve new apprenticeship models and meet the targets that have been set. As I*

mentioned previously, we must provide pathways through to a university qualification for students who are coming from the FE sector. The opportunities have been there in the past and we have worked with the TU sector. Some of our best students have come from that sector, which will not change. We have an opportunity to enhance that co-operation and co-development of new programmes and buildings and the sharing of those facilities.'

69. Mr. Horgan further explained the *'main challenge facing MTU in addressing the skills shortage when it comes to apprenticeships is the lack of facilities, such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops and offices. We receive capital funding for equipment when new curricula are introduced but no funding is provided for new buildings or the upgrade of existing buildings and services to install this new equipment. Targeted funding to upgrade buildings to support existing and new apprenticeships is essential for the delivery of the apprenticeship targets. Opportunities also exist to develop new shared facilities with the further education sector.'*

70. Mr. Deenihan stated *'as for expansion, MTU must increase its capacity significantly to meet current and future demographics. A major issue for us is a lack of buildings and services, as distinct from lack of equipment. We anticipate student growth at a rate of 35% over the next decade. Based on a norm of 10 sq. m per student, MTU requires a further 60,000 sq. m of space to meet demand. We have excellent projects at various stages of design and development for new buildings and refurbishments, which will address issues of sustainability and housing. TUs can lead the way on these Government priorities if given the mandate, power and funding to do so.'*

COMMUNITY AND INTERNATIONAL

71. The THEA emphasised *'the establishment of technological universities offers new possibilities for the sector to build productive relationships overseas. Technological universities will be able to build broader and deeper partnerships with a wider range of HEIs and attract different categories of*

students. Seed funding to allow technological universities to develop these relationships, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Foreign Affairs, would deliver a return on investment. The European Universities project, for which some welcome funding has been recently received, is a key international project in which our HEIs are partaking, but support for aspirants must also be forthcoming’.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

72. The THEA noted *‘in building Research and Innovation capacity, it is essential to have a balance of 1) core funding, 2) capacity-building funding, 3) capital funding, and 4) competitively won funding, understanding that investments in the first three are essential to securing the latter. The main challenge is that core funding is insufficient, so any R&I capacity-building funding (which, while very welcome, is time-limited) is being used to fund initiatives that would more sustainably be funded from core: it presents a particular challenge to establishing the well-resourced research & innovation support offices typical of a university sector.’*

73. The WIT further outlined *‘the TUs are understood to be more connected with industry and enterprise than other universities. In engaging in education and research that addresses “the needs of individuals, business, enterprise, the professions, the community, local interests and other stakeholders in the region in which the campuses of the technological university are located” (TU Act 9.1(b)), the Technological Universities are understood to be deeply engaged with regional stakeholders in particular. Funding in support of (a) research and innovation, (b) engagement, and (c) technology transfer is critical if the TUs are to be able to fulfil this aspect of their missions.*

It is a legislative requirement, and in any case is expected by stakeholders, that the research performance of IoTs is considerably elevated in transitioning to a TU. This will require dedicated, focussed and sustained investment. We strongly endorse concentrating investment in TUs in areas of strong critical mass in order to enhance the quality and international

profile of these research domains. A focus on the quality and impact of the research produced by HE must be the determining factor in investment.'

74. Mr. Donohoe stated *'on research in the TUs, there is a successor to Innovation 2020. A new research strategy is currently being developed. We should look back on the programme for research in third level institutions, PRTL, which has been in place since 1998, the fifth cycle of which finished a number of years ago. That has successfully supported those doing PhDs and research in third level institutions. That model should be extended to the Technological Universities. We should explicitly, in terms of incentives, acknowledge the regional focus of the TUs. Mr. Neil McDonnell mentioned we need more applied research and that small firms do not draw down research funding. That is largely true. Some 70% of research funding goes to foreign direct investment, FDI, companies. We need to consider a model that encourages SMEs to engage with the technological universities. We know the best way of increasing research funding is to leverage industry investment. Industry investment in research has increased at a much faster rate than State research in higher education and it accounts for approximately 70% of total research funding in the State. Given the profile of our companies, many of which are knowledge intensive, we need to use that to leverage investment into HEIs and specifically the new TUs.'*

75. Dr. Seoighe stated *'one of the programmes we introduced is our TU partnership programme. The ability to apply for research is as much a cultural thing and a learning thing as it is anything else. There is an onus on the TUs to become much more research intensive. In our partnership model, we partner the technological universities with the universities that have long-standing experience of doing that and the idea is that knowledge will transfer across the TUs to help with leapfrogging the process a little.'*

76. Professor Prendergast stated *'we need two things. First, we need the constraints to be taken off the TU sector. The Deputy might not know this but the contracts that academic staff can be offered and their remuneration within*

TUs is very much less than in traditional universities. We in the TUs need to have those constraints taken off to allow us to compete in the market for top class academics who can compete for this European funding and, indeed, to incentivise academics already employed in the TU sector to compete for it too. The Deputy is right; there is plenty of money on the table for research Europe-wide and the TU sector wants to play a greater role in successfully getting this money into Ireland. Different kinds of academic contracts are needed and a little more flexibility in how we manage those contracts is also needed. We also need the State to make a significant investment in the TUs, including capital investment to upgrade the buildings because we cannot do top-quality European research in much of the current infrastructure that we have, certainly in SETU. We also need capacity building through hiring staff to compete for those research funds. We will get every euro of investment in that kind of infrastructure - capital investment and people - back many times over in successfully competing for European research funds. As the Deputy said, significant amounts of money are out there but we need to incentivise people, and have the resources and infrastructure, to go with successfully competing for that funding.'

TEACHING AND LEARNING

77. The THEA noted 'to achieve the SDG-related national policy objective¹³ of providing "a more flexible system, with a greater choice of provision and modes of learning for an increasingly diverse cohort of students", it is essential to provide adequately for different modes of study and for different learning styles. In 2020-21, 25% of students from institutions represented by THEA are enrolled part-time compared to 17% in other institutions¹⁴. Some 12% of students are registered as 'remote' compared to 3% in other institutions. These figures illustrate the flexibility that is commonplace in our institutions.'

¹³ SDG Policy Map and Matrix, available [here](#)

¹⁴ Key Facts and Figures 2020/2021 | Statistics | Higher Education Authority ([hea.ie](#))

FUTURE EXPANSION

78. QQI expressed the view *‘It is important that the future funding model for higher education enables them deliver their diverse missions (set in the Technological Universities Act, 2018, section 19) to ‘reflect the needs of individuals, business, enterprise, the professions, the community, local interests and other stakeholders’ in their regions; and to promote the involvement of those same stakeholders in the design and delivery of their programmes.’*

79. Ms Austick made the point *‘As Institutes of Technologies across different geographical locations merge, investment in public transport links is required. USI believes it is important that the government addresses the lack of public transport infrastructure, in the rural areas particularly.’*

RECOMMENDATIONS: FUTURE EXPANSION OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

3. The current inability of Technological Universities (TU)s to borrow money on the financial markets is both unfair and unsustainable and puts them at a clear disadvantage. The enabling legislation should be enacted by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) so that borrowing can commence by end 2022. The borrowing capacity could be used for a wide range of purposes including student housing, infrastructure and research and development expansion.
4. Technological Universities (TU)s should be supported to develop their applied research and innovation capacities as a key part of their future mission. To this end, ring fenced funding should be provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) through a Special *Technological Universities Research and Innovation Fund*.

5. An *Expert Working Group on Human Talent in the Technological Universities* should be established by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Group should be chaired by an External Expert and be comprised of Senior Department and Higher Education Authority (HEA) Officials, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), Senior TU Human Resources staff, Industry Representatives and Staff Unions, Exchequer & Non-Exchequer funding agency representatives, international best practice experts. The Group would examine, *inter alia*, academic employment contracts, employment conditions and recruitment and retention policies

CHAPTER 4 – FUTURE EXPANSION OF CRAFT APPRENTICESHIPS AND NEW GENERATION APPRENTICESHIPS

80. In oral evidence, on 24 May 2022, Mr Ray English, Official Delegate, WorldSkills Ireland, stated *‘there is a co-ordinated campaign through the national apprenticeship office and the work done by World Skills Ireland. The visibility of that campaign is important. It comes back to the Senator’s earlier point. For us, it is a matter of resources. I am sure the committee hears that all the time. Mr. Hourihan and I, along with Mr. O’Halloran and Mr. Keys in the Gallery, make up the executive of World Skills Ireland and we all do this on a voluntary basis, as do all the examiners. Resource allocation really needs to be considered. It is about that funding allocation. The Senator is aware of what it was. It has not increased since 2019.*

We have to grow the range of activities to engage people, such as using the champions we have available to go to schools. That is what that is about. It is about that connection. Ms Yeates is absolutely correct. It needs to happen much earlier. The information needs to be provided much earlier. We are trying to target transition year. It is that lag time. That is where we will make a difference.

It is about equity of skills and presenting all the skills together. It makes no difference to us whether a person is in digital construction or a bricklayer. We cover them all, from level 5 right through to level 8. That equity that one can be what one wants to be is really important. Promoting that to parents is key.

We are working on our next advertising campaign for the competition in October. It aims to encourage parents to come along, engage with the companies who will be advertising there and see what are the career opportunities. They can engage with the educators. Seeing the link between education and one’s day-to-day career, and to where that can bring one, is key.’

81. In oral evidence, on 24 May 2022, Ms Megan Yeates, 2019 WorldSkills Logistics Competitor, remarked *'having attended many conferences, both nationally and internationally, what is interesting to note is that when we sit here and talk about the TY and the leaving certificate students, many of the European countries talk about this in respect of primary level students and entering second level. We leave it too late to approach the students. I remember being in fifth year and people had already set their mind on what they were going to do when they left school. If a career guidance or talk was given in sixth year, they were so closed-minded because they had already selected something that might not necessarily have been something that they wanted to do. They had made that decision and did not have to think about it further as they approached the leaving certificate examinations.'*

As Mr. Twomey said, going into schools and sharing those stories and opportunities sooner rather than later, and targeting students at a younger age, would be a good idea. Students would then have time to do their research and to really and truly think about what they might want to do in further education. That would be of a great benefit to the students.'

82. Ms Yeates also stated *'I have approached schools and offered a completely free talk or presentation or even just to provide material on the opportunities and jobs in the sector but found that either you cannot find a contact or the schools do not want to engage. By contrast, official engagements arranged along with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors have been very well received. Therefore, we must find avenues. There are plenty of apprentices. A team of 17 apprentices travelled to Kazan in Russia with Mr. Twomey and myself and I know that plenty of us are willing to share our stories to help to show people the opportunities that are available whether that is through a level 8 course or as an apprenticeship. We would like to show the different avenues you can take to enter these careers. We must find ways to bridge that gap, which is why I think that the World Skills Ireland event at the RDS is a great opportunity to showcase careers. While that event is great for anyone*

who attends, the question is how do you reach the people who do not engage. Perhaps it would be helpful if we went to people. We must find ways to bridge that gap.'

83.Ms Yeates made further points on female participation in apprenticeships, stating *'there is still a stigma which applies much more to females than it does males. There is much more of an acceptance that males will go on to apprenticeships and that there are enough college courses for females among which they should be able to find something to suit their fit. I have come through the full educational system and did not have the opportunity. The logistics apprenticeship did not exist when I was coming out of school. If I was given the choice to go back again, I would be more inclined to take the apprenticeship because I can see the benefits behind it. I was not qualified to work in my field until I completed my four years. While the guys in the apprenticeship get experience in their industry before they are even fully qualified, those of us in further education did not have that. It is very easy to do four years in the classroom but when one goes out into the working world, it is a whole different experience.'*

84.In its submission, the National Apprenticeship Office explained *'Apprenticeship is a dual model that combines learning in the workplace, at least 50% on the job, and learning delivered by an education and training provider. Over 8,300 employers who currently use apprenticeship as a talent pipeline place a high value on the learning their apprentices complete in the education environment. It is intended that the number of employers using apprenticeship will grow over the next four years, with 10,000 apprentice registrations per annum by 2025, which will require a significant expansion of the system.*

85.In 2021, Minister Harris provided an additional €10m of investment in apprenticeship facilities across higher education, with a matching additional €10m for further education. To fulfil the ambition and the targets that are set out in the Action Plan, investment will need to continue this year and in

subsequent years as Ireland works to deliver on major targets, including building 300,000 new homes by 2030 and the massive programme to retrofit our current housing stock.

Technological Universities and other higher education institutions have a vital role to play in supporting apprenticeship expansion and in ensuring that apprentices receive high-quality training that equips them for their careers and their contribution to the prosperity and growth of our country.

In addition to construction, electrical and engineering-related apprenticeships, we now have a vibrant suite of apprenticeship programme in areas that include tech, bio pharma, financial services, healthcare, hospitality, and manufacturing. Apprentices can achieve qualifications at degree level, masters' level and to-date we have one PhD apprenticeship, for principal engineers. The national apprenticeship system provides multiple lifelong learning opportunities where people can complete advanced apprenticeships as part of their career progression or as a means of changing career.'

86. The National Apprenticeship Office continued, stating they 'expect to have up to 70 national programmes available by the end of 2022. There is a strong pipeline of industry engagement and new apprenticeships coming down the line. Higher education institutions are actively responding to this demand and figuring out how a much larger and more mainstream apprenticeship offering forms part of their overall activities, alongside academic provision, research, and service to the community.

Just like all other learning opportunities, access, diversity, and inclusion are extremely important within the national apprenticeship system. The Action Plan for Apprenticeship includes a significant number of actions which will accelerate the number of women apprentices, those with disabilities, and other under-represented groups. A dedicated access committee is being established to advise the National Apprenticeship Office in this work. A first

step is already underway with introduction of a gender-based bursary for eligible apprenticeship employers.'

87.The USI stated it recognises the considerable amount of work that has been undertaken to increase the number of apprenticeships available, the variety of apprenticeship programmes offered, and the focus given on greater awareness and support for apprenticeship programmes within schools. However, the submission remarked *'the cost of apprenticeships and lack of financial support provided throughout an apprenticeship programme remains the largest barrier to education.'*

88.The USI strongly advocated for the overturning of the introduction of a pro-rata student contribution charge in Budget 2014 and supports the reinstatement of the state contribution which would cover the registration fee of the apprenticeship. The USI welcomed *'doubling the apprentice bursary/support scheme outlined within the Apprenticeship Action Plan, which was to fund up to 200 apprentices per year who are experiencing severe socio-economic disadvantage and who are from target groups, including lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers and Roma communities. Financial supports to employers should be increased to address the additional needs of apprentices with disabilities.'*

89.In its submission, Foras na Gaeilge opined *'appropriate courses should be developed at a standard that is on par with the provision in English and provided through Irish for people from Gaeltacht schools or Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht. Students with a high proficiency in Irish in English-medium schools for example, could also benefit from these apprenticeships.'*

90.El remarked the expansion of *'craft and next generation apprenticeships has a critical role to play in meeting key industry skills needs, both existing & emerging in a rapidly changing operating environment. Apprenticeships must have a key role moving forward in Higher Education and Further Education to*

address critical skills needs. The focus of the new apprenticeship model on collaboration between enterprise and the education and training sector to identify and address short- and medium-term skills needs is positive and should be expanded further, and the engagement of employers with regional education and training providers underpins stronger regional economic development.'

91.IDA Ireland reported a *'key focus for IDA Ireland is the operation of Apprenticeships in disciplines most relevant to supported FDI high technology sectors such as ICT, Medical Devices, Engineering, Bio Pharmaceuticals and International Financial Services. IDA clients in the Life Sciences and Technology sectors are particularly interested in the new apprenticeship model as a way to acquire new talent that they are struggling to find in the market, in the area of quality control and regulatory functions for example.'*

92.IDA Ireland further commented as the *'apprenticeship model provides a clear career progression pathway for entry level roles, there is longer-term commitment and improved retention of people who would be more likely to leave for promotional opportunities after 1 to 2 years at entry level. This model provides a more strategic and wide-reaching approach to talent pipeline development for larger multinational companies.'*

93.Mr. McDonnell stated *'our membership remains concerned at the slow pace of development in craft and new generation apprenticeships. We believe that Ireland has overpromoted academic learning at the expense of technological and skills learning. The disparity between pre- and post-2016 apprenticeships is unacceptable. Analysis by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform confirms low levels of take-up in post-2016 apprenticeships. The €2,000 grant per apprentice per year is inadequate to cover employer costs.'*

94.Mr. Donohoe stated *'the target of 10,000 apprenticeship registrations probably will be realised but more than 80% of them are still in the craft area. It is a major disappointment that less than 20% of registrations are on these*

new post-2016 apprenticeships that are applicable to other sectors of the economy. They are important and the model was good because they gave the opportunity to progress from a basic level 6 right up to a level 10 PhD. They were a tangible way of linking further education and higher education. Unfortunately, although the model was great, the reality has failed to deliver. I do not think it is fully about finance. The speed at which these apprenticeships have been developed and approved has not been what it ought to have been. I still think the model is worth pursuing but it has not really delivered.'

95.Mr. McDonnell further commented *'they [SMEs] want people who have a technical competence. That is not to underplay technical versus academic education. If we look at the top ten universities in the world, Caltech and MIT are never out of the top ten and their emphasis is always on the technological while, of course, they are universities. I would not like what I said earlier to sound like a critique of the Technological Universities, but we do not see that emphasis on the technological as sufficient so far.'*

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

96.Ms Duggan expressed the view *'an important aspect of apprenticeship is the employer. The employer has such an important role to play and must be supported. Often employers have difficulty in releasing staff in order to partake in apprenticeship programmes. Extra support must be given to employers, particularly with a view to increasing the number of females that they attract into apprenticeship positions and into apprenticeship education.'*

97.Mr. Donohoe stated *'I agree fully that one-day-a-week release is preferable to block release. It is probably more workable.'*

NATIONAL TRAINING FUND

98.Mr. McDonnell commented *'on the question of the NTF [National Training Fund], the rate of expansion of the fund of late has been of concern to us. It will almost certainly break €1 billion this year. That needs to be spent on higher education. It must be spent on workplace learning as tertiary*

education. I do not mean this in any derogatory way, but it should not be spent within academia. Rather, it needs to go to workplace learning, lifelong learning and continuous professional development. We have given one example concerning the blue cert. It relates to learning that we have very clearly identified as absent among the owners of small businesses. There are really significant levels of ignorance of health and safety law, labour law, the working time directive and payment-of-wages legislation. Knowledge of this very basic subject matter is absent among tens of thousands of small business owners. It is in this area that we should be spending the money, because it is the employers that are paying. It would be a huge mistake to subsume the funding under the wider education budget.'

99.Mr. Donohoe stated *'the money is unspent money that was collected from employers to be spent on upskilling in the workplace. That is how it should be used. There are many really good programmes - Skillnet, for example, is an employer-led upskilling programme — that are underfunded, yet the money is still sitting in the fund. It does not make any sense to me.'*

INFRASTRUCTURE

100.Mr. Horgan stated *'we have been asked to increase the number of craft apprenticeships coming through the system. We have responded. Yet, at present we have approximately 274 hours of teaching online because we simply do not have the physical space to bring craft apprentices on campus. That might be an indication of the pressure we are under at the moment. Our labs and workshops are overcrowded in terms of space and equipment. There are no recreational areas for students. These are the current pressures. With increased numbers coming through, we are at a maximum and cannot go beyond numbers we have at the moment.'*

Given that we are the largest provider, I am worried about how we can respond to the increased numbers coming through. Over time, we have worked closely with the further education colleges in Cork, in particular, the Cork Training Centre in Bishopstown, where we have looked to share

facilities. We believe that that is an option where we could co-locate workshops and labs to benefit both the further education, FE, sector and the higher education, HE, sector. There are multiple other benefits as well. There is the fact that as a TU, we can offer to apprentices who graduate from our university a qualification that is internationally recognised. In addition, and this is a really important point, it allows pathways for apprentices through from level 6 to level 10.

In a nutshell, [...] we need funding for infrastructure to deliver the needed buildings, facilities and workshops. As well as this, a closer integration with a strategy around the co-locating and co-delivery of programmes with the FE sector is a wise way to invest in the future of craft apprentices.'

CAPACITY ISSUES

101. In oral evidence, on 1 March 2022, Dr. Mary-Liz Trant, Interim Director, National Apprenticeship Office, stated 'a study was done in 2019 with support from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the cost of training for the State. It came out at in and around €7,000 per apprentice per year. That was the average. That kind of analysis must be done again because we have more programmes coming on stream. There is a commitment in the action plan to look at that in detail. The other big cost for apprenticeships is capital expansion. I stated earlier that €20 million was allocated last year on top of the existing commitment to invest capital. We are just getting detailed figures now on what is needed for Housing for All and the retrofitting scheme. Given the scale of the challenge, it is our sense that we are going to need at least that much, if not more again, this year and for the next three to four years. That would go towards building more workshops and training spaces and doing it in a very innovative way to accommodate many more apprentices coming through.

In higher education, apprentices pay a contribution and that issue is raised in the context of costs for apprentices. Apprenticeships are done on an earn-as-you-learn basis, so all apprentices get a salary or a training allowance on the

craft apprenticeships. We hear feedback about how it can be difficult, particularly for older apprentices, to survive and manage on an apprenticeship salary, especially in the early years. This is something we will do work on, including through a wide survey of apprentices we will carry out later this year, to get that feedback in a much more systematic way. We will then examine what is possible and what will be needed if we want to deliver on that commitment.'

102. Mr. Michael Hourihan, WorldSkills Ireland, stated *'it is very straightforward. Our facilities are very limited. The building was built in the mid-70s and it was specific to the requirements that were needed then but things have changed. We need bigger workshops because the numbers have increased and we need more classrooms. We are doing some of our theory for the apprentice classes online, as we speak. We need classrooms and labs. It is very simple. That is the pitch. There is no point dressing it up. That is what is required.*

We have been asked to take on more numbers and we are doing that. We are converting classrooms into labs and workshops. However, we are stuck with the footprint we have. Is there any way of fast-tracking the process by which funding can be made available for building works? It is as simple as that.'

ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIPS

103. Mr. Horgan stated *'there have been some positive moves including, for example, the link on the CAO website to apprenticeships, although it needs to be further integrated. The link allows students to click on to the apprenticeship.ie website, which is a huge improvement as it allows employers to feature vacancies and to link with students. There have been other improvements and the new apprenticeship office will guide us into the development of a single apprenticeship system. It is getting the message out there. As a university, we feature apprenticeships in our prospectus.*

There is a cultural issue around the apprenticeship and for parents, encouraging students to go to university is probably an easier pathway than

encouraging them to go into an apprenticeship. That said, there is also an opportunity with the technological university sector offering pathways for apprenticeships through to level 10. That is a key point and is really important. Parents can see that industry is cyclical, especially the construction industry and if students begin an apprenticeship as a plumber, they do not know where that industry will be in five years' time and the student may end up unemployed. However, by offering pathways through, as we do, to add-on degrees at level 7 and beyond, we enable apprentices to avail of new add-on opportunities.'

104. Ms. Horan remarked *'gender stereotyping goes beyond apprenticeship. My career in the ESB demonstrated to me that it is a real issue in the context of craft apprenticeships and I know how difficult it is to overcome that. The 30% Club and DCU worked together over the last few years to build an internship for trainee teachers. This may sound counter-intuitive but they set up paid internships over the summer to enable trainee teachers to go into industry where they could experience all aspects of working in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, STEM, careers. That was done because we feel that teachers and career guidance need to adjust to modern society and the modern career options. It is not just about technology but about the broader areas and about gender stereotyping.*

That whole question of gender stereotyping is fundamental because 50% of the talent is female and we need to use that across all sectors. I am passionate about that and I believe that higher education can play a really important role in that respect.'

105. Dr. Smyth remarked *'the female apprenticeship issue has been ongoing. The gendering of occupations is built in from very early on. We have done research on the take up of woodwork and metalwork at school level and found that it is very hard to break gender stereotyping, but schools could do more to help. It is also hard to be the pioneer and the first or only girl in a class. It is key that we consider gender and social background in encouraging different*

groups of young people to go into apprenticeships. It is very hard to break the views by parents and young people that an apprenticeship is a second-best opportunity.'

RECOMMENDATIONS: FUTURE EXPANSION OF CRAFT APPRENTICESHIPS AND NEW GENERATION APPRENTICESHIPS

6. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should provide ring fenced funding to the Technological Universities (TU)s, as necessary, to ensure there is sufficient physical capacity and lecturer capability to deliver on the increased numbers of Craft and New Generation Apprentices. To this end:

- The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Emergency should provide Short Term Funding to bridge the gap.
- From 2023, the Department should provide Multi Annual Funding through a new Apprenticeship Fund.
- The Higher Education Authority (HEA) should commence a Review of the Craft and New Generation Apprenticeship Building Requirements by Q3, 2022, with the aim of delivering the buildings required to ensure Apprentices are educated to the highest international standards within a 3-year period.

7. The cost of apprenticeships and lack of financial support provided to apprentices needs to be addressed, as follows:

- Providing financial support to eligible apprentices through the SUSI Grants Scheme for periods of Block Release and for the purchase of expensive tools and equipment, where necessary.
- New generation apprentices should receive the same financial payment from SOLAS as the craft apprentices.

8. Additional financial supports should be given to employers to facilitate hiring apprentices with disabilities, those from minority backgrounds and female apprentices.
9. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in liaison with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) should initiate an urgent Review of The National Training Fund (NTF) to assess the adequacy of employer contributions and the efficiency of the distribution of funds.

CHAPTER 5 – ACCESS, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

106.El made the point *‘diverse and inclusive businesses are more innovative, creative, and dynamic, supporting diversity and inclusion is a key priority for enterprise. Creating further gender diversity in the student body, particularly in high-demand areas such as Engineering and STEM, should be a focus in any funding strategy.’*

107.The THEA reported the *‘total number of students enrolled in THEA member institutions increased by 23.7% from 2014/15 to 2020/21 compared to an increase of 15.6% for other institutions.’¹⁵ With the increase in student numbers, student support services have faced increasing demands and particularly in our institutions where such services suffer from legacy funding inequalities. Given their profile, our students have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Existing inequalities in terms of housing, income, and cultural capital have been amplified. Students have sought to maintain their learning while dealing with challenges relating to mental health and wellbeing, poor quality study spaces off-campus, and extended periods of isolation which undermined the traditional “whole student” experience. While our institutions acknowledge and welcome the several additional “one-off” funding initiatives provided during this time, it is critical that we move to multi-annual funding to enable strategic planning and decision-making - with commensurate efficient reporting processes so that these essential services are enabled to devote their time to the support of individuals.’*

108.The IUA noted *‘much progress has been made on increasing access for disadvantages students over the last decade. We now need to build on that progress. No student should have their educational future dictated by their post code. Our universities have all provided enhanced access to students through the DARE-HEAR schemes and otherwise. They can expand access further provided the necessary funding is made available through a sustainable funding model.’*

¹⁵ [Key Facts and Figures 2020/2021 | Statistics | Higher Education Authority \(hea.ie\)](#)

109.Gael Linn opined *‘remote learning should be an integral part of third level provision from now on.’*

110.Foróige stated it would like to see *‘additional supports provided to secondary level students and schools to help prepare students for third level study and training. As such, they believe that personal and life skills development should be available to all young people to prepare them for this transition to higher education in order to support student success and enhance retention rates in higher and further education courses.’*

111.Foróige proposed *‘one-to-one mentoring be made available across all higher education institutions to support students as they enter and while on course, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds.’*

112.Conradh na Gaeilge called for *‘appropriate funding to be provided to cater for Mental Health and Wellbeing issues through the medium of Irish.’*

113.IDA Ireland noted *‘society benefits from more people having opportunities to enter rewarding careers. A recent ERSI report¹⁶ highlighted that Ireland had the fourth lowest employment rate among people with disabilities of working age in 2018. Furthermore, 30% of people of working age with disabilities had third-level education, while it was 47% for people without disabilities. There is further untapped potential among carers who have left the workplace, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who left education after post-primary school.’*

114.Regarding gender equality initiatives in universities, in oral evidence, on 29 March 2022, Dr. Arjumand Younus, Women in Research Ireland (WIRI), stated *‘I see a lot of training around bias, hiring committees and HR. As I said, however, there are not measures to build confidence in minorities and women*

¹⁶ [ESRI Survey and Statistical Report Series Number 107, September 2021](#)

that there should be. SFI has public engagement things but they should be more targeted to women, and ethnic minority women, so they know the options out there. Furthermore, I do not think that academic posts are enough. This is a problem around the world, not just Ireland. We need alternative career paths and academia should incorporate these in their training structures.'

115. In oral evidence, on 29 March 2022, Mr. Peter Brown, Director, Irish Research Council (IRC), opined *'traditionally, our research assessment has placed too much emphasis on relatively narrow metrics relating to the track record of the researcher but we are very much moving away from that now. The IRC is a signatory to the San Francisco declaration on research assessment, which basically states that the important thing is the quality of the research proposal and that we should not focus overly on narrow metrics relating to the track record of the researcher. There is a significant amount of work ongoing in this area within Ireland and the EU. A major project to create a fairer research assessment framework has just commenced and the IRC is a signatory to a coalition underpinning that. That will extend the emphasis in research assessment on different types of experience that people bring to the table, such as clinical experience or experience in industry or policy making. That will have a positive impact on supporting diversity'*.

116. Mr. Brown told the Committee *'as regards women in research, to be accepted to the IRC's post-doctoral fellowship programmes, for example, one needs to have completed one's PhD within a certain period. However, if the person had career breaks, breaks in work relating to having had children or other types of leave, we take account of that in applying that criterion. Those kinds of policies and practices help to support greater diversity in terms of who is coming into the research system.'*

117. Dr Smyth stated regarding future-proofing Higher Education Institutes *'first, we need a sustainable model of funding for higher and further education. We have talked about some of those issues and the potential for a contribution*

from graduates. Second, we need to make sure that students and staff are representative of Irish society in terms of gender, social background, ethnicity and disability status. Third, we need to ensure that there is enough flexibility to respond to the needs of the labour market and as new skills are required. We also need flexibility in how we provide higher education. We saw a very swift pivot to online provision during the pandemic. There are a lot of mature students who would benefit from more access to distance learning and more flexible forms of learning because there has been a decline in the number of mature students over the last few years, which is concerning.'

COVID-19 SUPPORTS

118.Mr. Miley stated *'we need to recognise that the two Covid-19 packages supplied by the Government helped our institutions to supply the services and provide some direct support to students which helped to mitigate some of the effects of Covid-19. The good news, although I do not have the data to hand, is that there are no indications from what we have seen of any diminution in progression levels as a result of Covid-19... A combination of the supports and the fact there was nothing else to do except study may be the dominant issues. Progression levels across our institutions are very high and we compare very favourably with other countries in that. Among the universities we represent, the non-progression levels are below 10%. In some European countries from first year, they can be 30% to 40% to 50% where they have more unfiltered access to their systems.'*

ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY

119.Dr. Seoighe stated *'the Senator said that women need a hand up instead of a handout. In terms of correcting gender imbalance, small simple things done in the right way can have a large impact and we have seen that in some of our calls, for example, reviewers being given bias training. It is about experts looking at the language in the call that might be inadvertently putting people off the call and preventing applications. There are other aspects where, with all things being equal, we then advantage the women first and put them at the top of the list. The merit is still exactly the same but with ceteris*

paribus or all else being equal, we have seen a doubling in the impact over the past couple of years. We experiment with things and employ strategies to improve the situation. Some work and some do not but the ones that work sometimes can have a really big impact for small changes.'

120.Dr. Younus stated *'if one cannot pay the bills, one will not consider taking up unpaid labour. Much of the work to gain clinical experience is unpaid. I do not have a solution for this. It is a big problem, especially for those who have to pay for childcare. Childcare in this country is very expensive. There was a point when I was on a short-term contract as a post-doctoral researcher that all of my salary went towards childcare. I did not mind that because I was developing my career. I had the luxury of being able to do so because there was another salary coming in. Single mothers or mothers who are disadvantaged do not have that luxury, so they will never gain that clinical experience [...] It is also tied in with higher education policies. The Government needs to sort out the issue of childcare in order to increase the number of female academics and incentivise people who wish to do research experience or clinical experience. It needs to provide more childcare subsidies or something like that. I do not have a proper solution but it is a very important issue to address if we want more women in the workforce.'*

121.In its submission, the Institute of Physics stated *'the importance of physics to Ireland's economy today is strong with IOP commissioned research conducted by CEBR (Centre for Economics and Business Research) showing Ireland's Physics Based Industries have a turnover of €81bn. They contribute Gross Value Added (GVA) of €29bn and Full Time Equivalents of nearly 200,000 jobs with €12bn in Compensation of Employees (an average salary of €59k). Physics Based research work is performing well with a strong ecosystem.*

Improving equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is a core pillar of the IOP's strategy. The Institute's Limit Less campaign has shown significant underrepresentation in physics at all levels of education. There are too few

girls, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, disabled people, those who identify as LGBT+, and minority ethnic groups electing to study physics. Some young people are put off studying physics by misconceived ideas about what physics is. Others are denied the opportunity to study physics due to the prejudice and stereotypes that they experience because of who they are. Some do not pursue the subject as they do not know the opportunities and career to which it would lead.

It is fundamental that there is a comprehensive and consistent data-gathering of those studying subjects which can then shape interventions. For example, the University of Limerick Physics department received an Athena Swan award for its successful work on gender disparity:

“a range of impact driven activities and initiatives, including extensive outreach activity to encourage female students to take physics as a Leaving Cert subject and study the subject at undergraduate level. The physics department has seen an increase in female undergraduates from 37% to 54%, supporting their aim to increase the number of female physics teachers in Ireland.”

122.Dr. Murphy stated ‘*The establishment of the programme for access to higher education, PATH, is an investment of more than €40 million over six to seven years and funds projects across three PATH strands. The enhancement of equity of access statistics through the collection of deprivation index scores for the student population, now into its third year of data collection, provides a more detailed and accurate insight into the socioeconomic profile of our student population than was ever previously possible. The strengthening of universal design for learning, UDL, in higher education that supports more inclusive learning environments and practices for all students has been achieved through measures including strategic funding for projects in UDL. A range of Covid-19 interventions designed to*

support vulnerable and disadvantaged students impacted by the pandemic have been put in place.'

123. In oral evidence, on 1 March 2022, Mr. Tim Conlon, Head of Policy and Strategic Planning, HEA, stated *'there have been marginal improvements in Irish Traveller numbers in higher education. For example, there were 33 new entrants in the year 2020-21 versus 26 in 2012-13, but that was nonetheless very slight incremental growth. Currently, approximately 119 students who are enrolled in higher education institutions identify their background as that of Irish Traveller, compared with 78 about ten years ago.'*

As for specific programmes, under PATH 1, teacher educators in Mary Immaculate College, MIC, are working to involve Irish Traveller students in teacher education. One of the most important aspects will relate to role models, because they are the people who, for example, encourage students to Ballyfermot College of Further Education to take the first step and look at opportunities ahead, and that is not reflected in classrooms. In the teacher education space, therefore, we are making significant inroads such that people in schools will be able to see themselves reflected in those who teach them and engage with them.'

Thirteen Irish Traveller students are registered on the programme and, of those, quite a number are progressing, although not all, given it is challenging to get through education, but we are making some inroads. We are trying to continue and extend the programme and to raise awareness among Traveller students, specifically the 15-to-18-year-old cohort, whom we are trying to engage in the programme. We are seeking also to assist graduates coming out of the programme to progress in their education or into teaching careers.'

124. Mr. Conlon went on to state *'we have done broader work on race equality, for example, in higher education. We have published a report on that and are developing an action plan to examine how intersectionality impacts on people. They may have all kinds of issues that cause them problems in their*

progression, so we are examining how all those issues intersect and how we can do better in respect of an action plan on developing race equality. In the context specifically of marginalised groups, a number of institutions are engaging with direct provision, for example, and looking at how they can help.'

125. In oral evidence, on 1 March 2022, Mr. Andrew Brownlee, Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS, stated *'I think [there are] about 700 or 800 participants in further education come from the Traveller and Roma communities. There are targeted initiatives through our community education programme and we funded a number of projects under the mitigating against educational disadvantage fund last year.*

One of our main worries is that we have lost approximately 10% to 15% of learners in that target group and in some of the other marginalised target groups because of the pandemic, given we had to go online, which just does not suit people who have wider support needs and require that peer network. It is something we are actively trying to address by getting numbers back up to pre-pandemic levels, and it is a priority.'

126. Professor Prendergast stated *'at Trinity College Dublin, where I used to work, 60% of the students are now women. It is in specific disciplines that issues arise, typically engineering. Computer science is another. There are good employment opportunities and careers to be had at the end of computer science courses, but less than 20% of students on some courses are women. There are specific courses and disciplines where we need to pay attention.'*

STUDENT GRANT SCHEMES

SUSI

127. Ms. Austick stated *'the largest barrier in access to education is the financial cost. It is not a desire to attend college or awareness of it that is lacking. It is due to the cost of attending higher education, that is, the cost of student accommodation coupled with the fees, the cost of living and the hidden*

course material costs. It is everything together. The TU Dublin cost-of-living guide estimates that it costs €10,000 to attend one year of college. It differentiates between people attending college in Dublin, Galway, Cork or Letterkenny. We need a new student accommodation strategy that commits to tackling the student accommodation crisis in the most effective and efficient manner possible and has short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals.

128.Dr. Doris stated ‘when we assess access, we find that Ireland has quite a good record in getting students into higher education, by international standards. We should be very proud of that. The HEAR scheme has been particularly useful in that respect and the universities worked very hard in this area. However, that is not all there is to access. It cannot be the case that there are students who, because of their background, cannot fully engage with their education. We can be as innovative as we want but if students cannot engage with the education we are providing, that is very much a problem. They will not get the grades they should get and grades matter for earnings. They are one of the main returns that students seek. They are not the only thing they look at when they go to university but an important aspect of it. If their financial position is causing a systematic downgrading of their achievements, we should be very concerned about it. This issue could be rectified very quickly. Most students do not want to be working and know they should not be working so much but the financial pressures at home dictate that they have to do so. It is either work or give up education altogether. I know there is a review of the SUSI grant under way and I hope it will be part of a serious effort to address the big shortfall in the cost of attending higher education for students because it is a big and growing issue.’

129.The USI further remarked the ‘Student Grant Scheme is a huge opportunity to support students to access education and progress in their learning journey. It is important to note the knock-on effects of a stagnant student grant scheme, deaf to inflation and higher costs of living. It affects many things such as disadvantaged & low-income families, engaging in part time or full-time

employment which may lead to students being unable to complete their studies satisfactorily.'

130.The USI further proposed *'international students should have access to financial supports within the grant scheme in Ireland. Students who have not lived in Ireland or another EU member state for 3 of the last 5 years do not qualify for EU tuition fee levels or the student maintenance grant, regardless of their nationality and/or citizenship. Disadvantaged groups like migrants, asylum seekers, those living in Direct Provision and undocumented migrants can't access education support through the current student grant scheme. Furthermore, International students cannot access the Student Assistance Fund (SAF).'*

131.QQI reported *'students enrolled in private higher education institutions are not eligible for SUSI grants, even though these awards are validated and made by QQI, a State awarding body. This merits consideration in terms of the overall policy on private higher education, including access by them, and learners, to targeted funding initiatives such as Springboard.'*

132.In its submission, Wake-Up SUSI stated 583 students currently enrolled on a course at a private HEI are eligible for SUSI funding. Its submission details a number of examples of students attending private colleges who are not eligible to receive a grant whose siblings attend a public university and are receiving full grant aid, despite having the same family background.

133.Foras na Gaeilge proposed *'the government should invest more in the courses offered to student teachers in the Gaeltacht as part of the B.Ed. course and should cover the fees for students.'*

134.Mr. Miley stated *'although the SUSI system has done a lot to give some students an opportunity they may not otherwise have had, some of those students are not getting enough. They are getting their fees paid but are still unable to afford to live while going to college. There are other prospective*

students who still are not getting in the door. We believe that needs to be reformed. There are preferential access routes through the disability access route to education, DARE, and higher education access route, HEAR schemes. The points system has been moderated to give opportunity to people who have a disadvantage, and that needs to be continually upgraded and improved. There is no point in opening the door in the context of the points system if the funding is not there to support the student on the other side.'

135.Dr. Doris stated *'there is more to access than attaining a place in higher education. It is also important that disadvantaged students complete their degrees and achieve the grades they are capable of, given that there is substantial evidence that degree grade affects future earning potential. In this respect, I believe it is important to consider the role of maintenance grants in ensuring true access. In recent years, these grants have fallen substantially in real terms when taking into account increases in living costs for students. In addition, family income thresholds for grant eligibility have fallen in real terms. Both of these facts have contributed to rising upfront costs for students and their parents, even those who qualify for both fee and maintenance grants.*

My experience as a lecturer tells me that this is resulting in an increasing number of students who are working substantial hours in the labour market and fitting their studies around their work, rather than vice versa. This may have been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. Although it is difficult to find data on hours of work of students, and especially on how work affects retention and grades in education, I regard the adequacy of maintenance grants as an important aspect of true higher education access. I note that modest grant increases and eligibility threshold increases have been announced by the Minister recently and that a more extensive review of the grant system is under way. This is indeed to be welcomed.'

136.Ms. Horan commented *'I strongly believe that abolishing fees would be a real mistake. Any talk of reducing fees with the State making up the balance*

to the institutions overlooks the fact that the State does not have an unlimited source of funding. The State needs to step up as well as the fees. The Senator will know from my membership of the Cassells group that I favoured going further and providing for income-contingent loans. Targeted supports for students are the answer. We need to address core funding for the ongoing supports to students while they are in the institution, which has been referred to by a number of other speakers. It is not just about getting people in the door on the first day but it is about supporting them to get the best experience and qualifications they can as a result of getting in that door. That is what will support them through their careers and further lives.'

137. Professor Rogers stated *'I agree that the ongoing review is welcome but, I suspect, is not radical enough. There is a simple reality around recognising what it costs to go to university, not just the fee component but also the living costs. If we want those students who were striving to get to university to go, then we must recognise that cost. All of the areas by which the grants are applicable, including the salary and income thresholds, really do need to be radically looked at in terms of what is a real issue. To get a special rate grant a student must be on very low income. Clearly that is not sufficient.'*

138. Ms. Horan further stated the *'issues are different if you live on the doorstep of DCU, UCD or NUI Maynooth. For many people in this country, the main issues are accommodation and travel costs. The fee is relatively minor. We must consider all those factors in any reform. We must be very careful.... Any reform must be targeted and well thought-out.'*

139. Dr. Smyth reported *'ESRI research has shown that student maintenance grant levels have fallen far below other comparators such as unemployment payments or average income, leaving students to rely heavily on part-time employment and direct and indirect support from their families. This poses challenges for those from low-income families and for students trying to balance working and studying. Further, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to base their choice of higher education*

institution on being able to live in the parental home, potentially limiting their horizons.'

140.Mr. McDonnell stated *'the entry levels to be eligible for support are very low, so middle-income families struggle to pay college costs. Child benefit ending at 18 for those still in full-time education does not give many parents the opportunity to save for college fees.'*

141.Mr. Brown stated *'on the SUSI grants, it is very important, given that PhDs are full-time students, that the SUSI grants are open to PhD candidates who may be of limited means and who may face barriers to participating in a PhD programme or acquiring a PhD qualification by reason of income constraints. It is very important that postgraduate students are included in the criteria for SUSI grants and can access those grants.'*

142.Dr. Seoighe stated *'we know that the PhD stipend is a real issue so if there was an option to use the fees instead for the PhD stipend, to increase that and bring it closer to the cost of living, that would be a real benefit to PhD students.'*

143.In response to the question of whether the witnesses would choose to cut student fees or reform the SUSI grant sytem, Mr. McDonnell stated *'retain fees, reform grants and, if necessary, move to a loan system that has forgiveness built in, where necessary.'* While Dr Smyth, ESRI, stated *'we need to increase grant levels. Initially when they were introduced in the early 1970s, they were pitched at the same level as means-tested unemployment payments. Now, unemployment payments are more than three times higher than grant levels. In the context of the increasing costs of living, particularly accommodation costs, it is a heavy burden for low-income families.'*

144.Dr. Smyth stated *'we need to look at financial incentives for young people. We need to increase the maintenance grant to adequately cover the costs of education so they are not left to rely on parental support. More importantly, we*

need to look at all of the steps along the way in their educational career, at performance levels and at guidance within the school system. We have seen an improvement in the transition to higher education from students who attended DEIS schools but there is still a massive gap there. We really need to look at increasing equity for disadvantaged students who attend DEIS schools but also those who do not. We really need to be putting in supports around teaching and learning and also guidance. We also need to consider a scale of funding for DEIS schools that reflects the complexity of needs there because the current funding does not bridge the gap. These are fundamental measures that are needed if we are to increase access. We also need to look at the mature student issue as well. As I mentioned, there has been a decline in the representation of mature students which is concerning.'

145.Dr. Seoighe stated *'sometimes, as well as the supports, it is about the awareness. Particularly in what we look after, STEM research and access, it is about building awareness from the early stages in all demographics that this opportunity and career are available to everybody. It is about engagement, and public engagement in particular. It starts with the parents as much as the schools and everywhere else when demonstrating that this is a career model and progression open to everyone. Building access and general public engagement is a core part of what we focus on doing. We often find people are not coming into the pipeline in the first place so we need to get people from all walks of life in Ireland into the pipeline and working through the system with adequate supports all the way along to ensure we do not have a leaky pipeline.'*

146.Professor Prendergast stated *'the opinion the Senator is hearing is my personal opinion. He referenced the interesting statistic that 60% of the students in the technological universities he mentioned - it is probably similar in SETU - are not paying this €3,000 anyway because it is being paid for them. It is the 40% from families which end up paying this €3,000 who look to benefit if it is abolished. Is that the best way to spend our money? The SUSI grant that 60% of students get now is not sufficient to live on. It might be*

better to spend that money on improving the SUSI grant rather than abolishing the student contribution for everybody. That is where I would come down on it if I was expressing a personal opinion. But the governing body of SETU has not discussed it.'

147. Ms. Yeates stated *'I can see the argument from both sides of the story. Because my parents could pay my college fees does not mean we were very wealthy or well-to-do. My parents had to scrimp, save and sacrifice things themselves to be able to put me through further education. I fell just short of the line to qualify. It is hard to say who deserves funding and who does not in that sense. It was very 50:50 whether I would have gone on to higher education or not. I could have fallen through the cracks and then I would have had to pick up a full-time job straight out of school, if we had not made those sacrifices. There are definitely people in that situation.'*

HEAR AND DARE SCHEMES

148. In response to a question on the efficacy of the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) Programmes, Dr. Smyth stated [there were] *'positive benefits of letting some students in on lower grades and points. There was some variation on implementation. We saw quite an increase in the proportion of young people from DEIS schools making the transition on foot of teacher-assessed grades.*

That benefited students more. We need to be talking about targeting resources to those DEIS schools serving the most disadvantaged groups support students. At the moment, we do not identify the most deprived schools at secondary level in the way that we identify urban band 1 at primary level to provide them with the additional supports.

We need to provide them with academic supports but also socio-emotional supports because that feeds into mental health. Socio-emotional well-being, more broadly than mental health, is worse in urban DEIS schools.'

149. In oral evidence, on 5 April 2022, Mr. Mark Smyth, Past President, Psychological Society of Ireland, outlined *‘the PSI wishes to highlight the unjustified inequity of the current operationalisation of the disability access route to education, DARE, scheme which is a third level alternative admissions process for whom the aim is to reduce barriers to accessing education, but in the area of mental health it in fact does the opposite. The DARE scheme is administered by the Irish Universities Association, IUA, for school-leavers whose mental health difficulties have had a negative impact on their second level education. It offers reduced points for applying to third level education. The current criteria for entry via the mental health condition route specifies that the only profession eligible to verify a mental health difficulty is a consultant psychiatrist.*

The PSI is of the view that this is an unnecessarily restrictive practice and there is a need for a change in this specification. The PSI would argue that there is no justification for the exclusion of highly qualified chartered psychologists from verifying the impact of mental health on young people’s education. Extensive training in the assessment and treatment of mental health conditions forms a core part of the training programmes in psychology and, therefore, is a skill-set and competency common to both psychology and psychiatry. A young person may have attended an appropriately qualified psychologist for assessment and-or support for their mental health condition. With the current process, the young person will be forced to also attend with a psychiatrist they are unfamiliar with and incur additional costs to the family. This creates a situation of inequity of access for the young person and their family. The position of the IUA, in the view of the PSI, represents an excessively narrow and medicalised view of mental health.’

GRANTS FOR PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

150. In its submission, the Students’ Union Dublin Business School and Griffith College Dublin asked *‘that our students should have access to the following supports currently available only to those attending publicly funded*

institutions: SUSI, Student Assistance Fund (SAF), Disability Assistance Fund (DAF), Free Fees Initiative, and the recent government range of Cost of Living Student Supports, Covid and Gaeltacht grants.'

DIGITAL LEARNING

151. Foras na Gaeilge emphasised the *'benefit of digital learning. They stated that additional digital support in the form of broadband and devices would help to alleviate the crisis in teacher supply in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools by allowing students in post-primary schools with low numbers of students take a subject via joint virtual classes.'*

152. IDA Ireland noted *'if the National Training Fund is to contribute more to higher education, it needs to focus on shaping hybrid talent with core transversal skills such as digital and data skills and technical skills. Currently the Digital Economy and Society Index shows that Ireland has an above average share of ICT specialists and ICT graduates (7% against EU average of 3.5%) but below average on ensuring that all adults have at least basic digital skills. This indicates a gap in the talent pipeline of core digital skills, general ICT and Innovation skills.'*

153. IDA Ireland further stated *'profound changes have occurred in the world of work in recent years, none more so than since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic which has accelerated industry adoption of digitalisation and disruptive technologies. Ensuring the higher education system is providing students with skills relevant for the future of work, in particular digital and data skills, will be critical if industries are to keep pace with technological disruption and digital transformation. Training pathways for people with little or no digital skills transitioning to new roles, provides them with relevant core skills that gives them an entry point to further ICT training or employment. The establishment of the FET-HE Transitions Reform Sub-Group by the DES in March 2017 was an important development in this respect; however, it is acknowledged across several national strategies that levels of progression*

should increase and a more consistent approach to facilitating such progression should be put in place.'

STUDENT ACCOMODATION

154.ICTU noted *'one recent study on the annual cost of attending third level found that it ranged from €6000 plus for students living at home, to over €14,5000 for those living away from home.¹⁷ Clearly, these costs have now become a significant obstacle to improved access and participation at higher level, for many students. They have been driven primarily by the exponential growth in fees ('student contribution') and the almost total absence of affordable student housing.'*

155.ICTU further stated *'the "student contribution" has effectively doubled since 2014 and with the exit of the UK from the European Union, these fees are now the highest across Europe. According to the EU Commission, some 11 member states charge no fees to first time undergraduates, while 14 other states charge fees at a significantly lower rate than is seen here, often well below €1000 annually. Indeed, the costs of attending higher level can be so punitive that many families are forced to cut essential spending and go into debt in order to meet the cost, according to a 2018 study by the Irish League of Credit Unions¹⁸. Recent sharp spikes seen in the cost of living will simply exacerbate this problem. At the root of the problem in the sector is the sharp fall in official funding it has seen over the last decade.'*

156.Professor Hegarty stated *'if we want student accommodation, we have to support it in a number of ways. It could be done by providing tax relief on the rent that is paid, through a similar provision to the Finance Act of 1999 which gave relief immediately, but with the clear promise that it will not be withdrawn halfway through. It could be done through student supports, through SUSI. There are a number of ways. Right now, student accommodation is very*

¹⁷ [The Cost of College Education in Ireland 2021 \(Zurich Ireland\)](#)

¹⁸ [Half of parents cut spending on family's clothing and goods to cope with third level costs \(20 August 2018\)](#)

expensive and not open to students in lower income groups. That is the reality of the matter. Having said that, we built our student accommodation in 2004 and it is now full.'

157.Mr. Miley stated *'on student accommodation, the reality faced by some of our members is that while they have planning permission for some student accommodation and the borrowings in place to pay for it, the cost of producing it is taking it to a level where students simply would not be able to afford it. Our members are very reluctant to go down a pathway of developing accommodation that is beyond the means of students. We have had a discussion with the Government and are awaiting a response. Student accommodation is part of the public good that Deputy Conway-Walsh spoke about in the broader scheme of third level education. In that context, the State needs to come up with some mechanism to support the building of additional student accommodation if it is to be made affordable for students.'*

158.Ms. Austick remarked *'a couple of people rent rooms to students, but we saw during the pandemic that many people were very cautious. They did not want just anyone living in their rooms and they took their rooms off the market. Covid has exacerbated the pre-existing student accommodation crisis. We need affordable purpose-built student accommodation that is available to students. We need to ensure the rent is affordable and the rooms are up to standard. It is about finding places for students. Very often we look at providing course places for students, and that is all great and we want more people to attend college, but we cannot forget about where they will live or stay or how they will commute to college.'*

159.Professor Prendergast stated *'it is worth emphasising the point that the majority of student accommodation built in traditional universities was built with borrowed money. The business cases for building student accommodation are strong. If the TUs were allowed to borrow for student accommodation and we have the governance processes in place to manage*

that, we would find student accommodation popping up on the TU campuses around the country.

We could have purpose-built student accommodation that was built in a way that was cheaper for students than accessing accommodation in the private market. It seems like a good idea to at least facilitate TUs in borrowing to build student accommodation. The business cases for that are strong and everyone would benefit.'

160. Professor Prendergast further stated *'student accommodation is a complicated thing. Much of student accommodation is built to double up as rental properties over the summer. It is high quality, with en suite bathrooms in every room and all of that. In many other countries, student accommodation has shared bathrooms at the end of a corridor. Those are much cheaper to build. Perhaps we should think in those terms about building purpose-built student accommodation rather than building student accommodation that doubles up as a hotel over the summer. The latter is obviously more expensive to build because a building need to be constructed to a higher quality, with better fittings and all of that, if it is to be rented out as accommodation over the summer. There is probably scope for a task force to look into how to better provide student accommodation not just in the TUs, as Mr. Deenihan said, but throughout the higher education sector overall.'*

161. Mr. Deenihan stated *'there is a mix of private and public sector student accommodation on campus. Some of the committee members may have benefited from on-campus student accommodation in the past. It creates a special culture on a campus and a special connection with it.... We are discussing accommodation in MTU, and I am struck by what having accommodation there means and why so many people want to go there. TUs will be competing with traditional universities that have accommodation on-site. We have to have that choice for parents who want to send their children to on-site accommodation. Based on experience and how matters work, if we were allowed to borrow just for accommodation, it would help. I am sure that*

many of the great buildings at UCC were built thanks to the European Investment Bank or the like.'

162.Ms. Feehily stated *'building affordable student accommodation will be a challenge in the current market and would require a fair degree of creativity on the part of the TUs. As we discussed with Deputy O'Callaghan, the student base at TU Shannon is 60% SUSI grant supported. For that cohort of people, the housing would need to be designated as social housing to attract all the Government social housing supports. This would be another way of assisting the development of student accommodation in our catchment area; I am not speaking for the other TUs in terms of the social piece. Otherwise, if we simply borrow and build, our students will not be able to afford that accommodation no matter how creative we are in terms of how many we fit in and how we design. It is as simple as that. In recent years, we have seen the development of a student body that is heavily dependent on public transport. These students are going home or couch-surfing. This does not create the student centre that Mr. Deenihan mentioned. Accommodation is not just about having a place to sleep; it is also about building a culture for the TU among the student body so that students are not arriving exhausted and going home in the evening. They do not join societies because they cannot. There is a cultural piece and a well-being piece, and all of that is connected with having good housing, but it also has to be housing that can be afforded.'*

RECOMMENDATIONS: ACCESS, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

10. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should initiate a Review of the SUSI grant system with a view to introducing a Reformed System by end of 2022. This should include, *inter alia*, cost of living assessment, the need to take all financial means and assets into account, awarding grants where most needed and full transparency.

11. The Student Capitation Fee should be reviewed but it is recommended that financial support, to ensure equity of access, be provided principally through the SUSI Grant system. The reduction or abolition of the Fee should only be considered when SUSI is reformed and adequately funded by the Exchequer.
12. All part time and blended Programmes in designated HEIs should be eligible for SUSI grants.
13. An *Emergency Task Force on Student Accommodation* should be established by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. It should comprise Senior Officials from the relevant Government Departments, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Housing Finance Agency.
14. The Ministers for Education and Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should review the ACCESS and DARE Schemes in liaison with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s Presidents. The Review should establish the existing barriers that need to be overcome and develop an Action Plan for both Schemes to overcome these barriers.

CHAPTER 6 – LIFE-LONG LEARNING, PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) TO SUPPORT STAFF

163.IDA Ireland proposed *‘the Higher Education System should be central to a national conversation on Lifelong Learning and its benefits to access job opportunities and move through job experiences. Any future funding model should account for Lifelong Learning as employees need time and the resources to access training and education and motivation to undertake development to prepare for the next wave of job opportunities.’*

164.The THEA explained *‘the transformation to Technological Universities is the biggest educational change of our times. For our employees, that will mean transformation and change also. At the time of writing, we are awaiting the final Report from the OECD advising on the academic contract and related matters. The introduction of Professor grades, a workload allocation model to reflect the changing nature of an academic’s work including research and administration as well as the traditional teaching and learning role, robust promotion structures, and new senior management structures will have to form part of that report. These changes will require significant increased core funding for the sector which will require a swift response from Government.’*

165.QQI proposed *‘public funding of NFQ Level 6 programmes has a critical bearing on diversity and volume of programmes in higher education, pathways within and between further and higher education and collaboration between different colleges and institutions. Funding incentives have contributed to the decline in both demand for and the offer of Level 6 programmes in the technological university sector. Future funding needs to reflect policy choices about provision and pathways. In this regard, the QQI commissioned review of the (NFQ) Level 6 Advanced Certificate, offered in the Further Education and Training sector, and the Higher Certificate offered in the Higher Education sector, finds that although different these qualifications are broadly comparable, may inform these policy choices.’*

166. The USI acknowledged the *‘crucial role of ancillary staff in Higher Education institutions, and also how education systems are rapidly evolving with increasing student numbers, wider student demographics and increasing use of technology. Therefore, they stressed that it is important that support staff are equipped to adapt to these changes and continue to thrive professionally. Funds invested into upskilling opportunities are returned two-fold in terms of staff morale, passion and output. Furthermore, it is students that will ultimately reap the benefits of a work environment that fosters innovation, training and development.’*

167. Furthermore, the USI acknowledged the work of *‘Students’ Union officers in supporting students nationally. The USI would like to see funding allocated to Students’ Union development and progression pathways for retired officers.’*

168. Foras na Gaeilge stated its Members *‘believe strongly in lifelong learning not only in terms of learning Irish/improving one’s language skills but also providing opportunities for adults to learn through the medium of Irish.’*

169. Dr. Younas stated *‘we in WIRI, other women and minority groups have experienced first-hand what this funding crisis means, namely, job insecurity, stagnant wages and chronically overworked academics. Underinvestment continues to compromise the quality of higher education in Ireland. It impedes access to education for the most vulnerable members of our society. This is worrying not only for current stakeholders but for future generations in Ireland. The current higher education policy must be revised to include a funding model that is sustainable. It must recognise the utmost importance of skilled workforce development, economy-focused collaborations, and the expansion of core funding for teaching and research.’*

With regard to the working conditions of women and minorities in Ireland, there has been progress. We have four female university presidents, the first

having been only appointed in 2020. Yet the majority of female academics are in precarious short-term posts and are contractually obligated to perform menial tasks. They are denied the dignity and respect they deserve for their hard-earned doctoral degrees. Their casual and fixed-term contracts devastate finances, mental health and make it impossible to plan for a family or the future.

We highlight the plight of women in academia because there is a gender divide in Irish universities. Women hold 71% of part-time temporary academic jobs, while 60% of permanent, full-time academic roles are held by men. A UCD Gender Equality Action Group report shows that 60% of female staff at University College Cork, UCC, University College Dublin, UCD, and National University of Ireland, Galway, NUIG, were on temporary contracts in 2019. Furthermore, a HEA survey stated that academics from ethnic minority groups are routinely denied equality and are paid less than their white academic peers. They are more likely to have experienced racial or ethnic discrimination. This tells us that women and minorities in Ireland are trapped in exploitative.'

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

170.El noted *'career progression in Higher Education Institutions is still primarily academic in focus.'* They believe that *'industry engagement and commercialisation should be explicitly included as part of a balanced scorecard for an academic's career progression.'*

171.In oral evidence on 29 March 2022, Dr Niall Kennedy, Irish Precarity Network, stated *'precarious staff are not paid for their research and receive no paid time off or financial support towards their expenses from institutions. The very high turnover of precarious staff within institutions - a situation intended to prevent them from qualifying for a contract of indefinite duration - has a significant impact on teaching quality too since these lecturers must constantly learn new material for new groups of students in new institutions.'*

MICROCREDENTIALS

172.El remarked micro-credentials are *‘very attractive for SME’s as they are flexible, stackable, bite size skills development and individuals can create their own roadmap, mixing skill areas. They are very effective in upskilling and reskilling staff, and support attraction and retention of talent. MicroCreds need to be encouraged and supported across Higher and Further Education, they can also be leveraged for targeted enterprise partnerships and cross-educational programme delivery.’*

173.IDA Ireland supported the use of microcredentials stating *‘upskilling/reskilling initiatives and the Irish Universities Association (IUA) Microcredentials project can support the delivery of lifelong learning opportunities in flexible formats that are accessible to all citizens to broaden the Irish talent pool.’*

174. Mr. Brownlee reported that *‘We have agreed with QQI a fast-track approach to making sure courses with micro-credentials can be developed quickly. One of the courses we are bringing to its panel next month is a level 4 course in sustainability. The idea is that this can be rolled out across all out FET courses, so every FET learner is equipped with environmental awareness, green skills and an understanding of sustainability. We are telling them to be the kinds of agents of change we need for tomorrow. That is the big ambition in our FET strategy and in the programme for Government.’*

RECOMMENDATIONS: LIFE-LONG LEARNING, PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) TO SUPPORT STAFF

15. An *Expert Working Group on Pathways from Further Education to Higher Education* should be established by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Group should be chaired by an External Expert and be comprised of Senior Department and

Higher Education Authority (HEA) Officials, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), SOLAS, Industry Representatives and Staff Unions. The Group should identify current opportunities and barriers to progression from Further to Higher Education and establish how to develop links between both sectors that allow for more seamless progression. To also review the opportunity to develop follow-on qualifications from QQI Level 5 in each course sector onto Higher Education courses.

CHAPTER 7 – RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

175.QQI reported *‘the earlier “Report of Expert Panel on the Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes in Irish Higher Education Institutions (2017)”¹⁹ recommended that, in recognition of the present diversity among Irish HEIs with respect to their capacities to host research degree programmes, Government and the HEA should act to ensure that all HEIs with the authority to operate research degree programmes have the conditions and resources necessary for their continued operation (in accordance with statutory quality assurance guidelines).’*

176.SFI stated *‘research undertaken within the higher education sector benefits the people of Ireland. Publicly funded research in Irish Higher Education Institutes generates new knowledge, new technology, new public policies and social innovations, new start-up companies, and educate and train cohorts of post-graduates who go on to make high-value social and economic contributions.’*

177.IFUT opined they are *‘concerned that the benefits of Research and Innovation are framed solely within the context of an economic return. It is a matter of historical fact that some of the most famous and socially important discoveries were made by scientists and researchers who had literally no idea, at the time of their discoveries, of the future benefits which accrued from their research and experiments. All aspects of research across the higher education sector need to be properly financed and staff working on ‘Blue Skies’ research should have contracts of employment comparable to colleagues working in industry on the commercialisation of research.’*

178.In oral evidence, on 8 March 2022, Dr. Andrew P. Allen, Chairman, Irish Research Staff Association (IRSA) stated *‘research is an investment that*

¹⁹ [Expert Panel Higher Education Research Report.pdf \(qqi.ie\)](https://www.qqi.ie/Expert-Panel-Higher-Education-Research-Report.pdf)

consistently makes returns that are greater than what we put in. Studies from Science Foundation Ireland, SFI, Indecon and University College Cork estimate that for every €1 invested in research, society reaps a benefit of between €3 and €5 to the economy. Research staff bring funding into universities, contribute to internationalisation of higher education, help to inform evidence-based policy and, although this is often under-recognised, contribute to teaching as well. Strategic investment in research is of benefit to various regions across Ireland and investment in research capacity across our universities, new technological universities, institutes of technology and other higher education institutes, HEIs, across all regions will be a great local, regional and national economic stimulus.'

179. Dr. Younus made the point *'furthermore, the absence of data is an impediment for the situation of academics to be clearly understood and acted upon. WIRI recommends data on participation, progression rates and the lived experience of staff at all levels be collected. Those data can be used to design adequate and up to date quality and inclusion strategies and initiatives.'*

180. Dr. Brown noted *'we need researchers to be able to see across the landscape where they fit in and that there is a set of predictable long-term funding schemes at different career stages that researchers can access. Tracking was mentioned. There is some good work going on under the auspices of the national framework or doctoral education. There is an advisory group there doing two pieces of work which I think would be valuable. One is a career tracking project to develop a greater insight into where PhDs are going post-completion. Another project being worked on is career profiling for people considering taking up a PhD to have more information on the kinds of roles and jobs both inside and outside of academia that a PhD gives access to. They are two important pieces of work that will help with this overall agenda.'*

POSTGRADUATE FUNDING

181. The USI proposed *‘a national stipend in line with the living wage for research postgraduates would enhance engagement in research and encourage the involvement of more postgraduate researchers of diverse backgrounds. The disparity in stipends across HEIs is essential to note, where some postgraduate students are earning less than beneficiaries receiving social welfare. This extends completion rates and affects students’ completion of the research at all. Ireland agreed to improve gender equality as one of its priorities with the European Research Area (ERA) policy framework. Statutory maternity cover available to postgraduate researchers would support this initiative.’*

182. Furthermore, the USI proposed *‘postgraduates should be fairly paid for working hours they do within their institution.’*

183. Ms. Austick stated *‘we must ensure there is a national stipend in line with the living wage for research postgraduates, which would enhance engagement in research and encourage the involvement of more postgraduate researchers of diverse backgrounds.’*

184. Dr. Seoighe stated *‘we have looked at it quite carefully and spent much time understanding the PhD model, talking to the PhD students and meeting with them pre pandemic. One of the things we learned is that it is a bit like everything else: one cannot be what one cannot see. We found many of our PhDs were not as industry-ready as they needed to be. They were not as ready for that next evolution. It was very much a PhD model designed to create academics in the system. However, we recognise that the vast majority of PhDs go into industry. Many of us have been through that precarity model down through the years, myself included, so I know what it is like when you move across. In the traditional PhD training, one is not necessarily going to be industry-ready when going into industry. Some of the things we are looking at are cohort-based training, where one works with a cohort of other PhDs or peers, because it can be a lonely life sometimes for those working as an*

isolated PhD, and also industry being part of the training programme, where 12 weeks or so of the training is actually with industry partners who make the PhDs industry-ready. The whole aim here is to have the world's best PhDs who are sort of able to command the kind of salaries here that they want and will attract the companies to be here, because that is what they come for. They come and stay for the talent.'

RESEARCH STAFF EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY

185.Dr. Allen stated *'the Research careers in HEIs are currently characterised by precarity, with research staff generally being employed on fixed-term contracts tied to specific research grants. The high turnover of research staff within the HEI sector means that experience is often lost from this sector. Research staff can also end up devoting a significant amount of time to chasing research grants where only a small number of candidates will succeed. Ireland has a demonstrable track record in producing long-term research, such as the study on which I am employed, the intellectual disability supplement to The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, TILDA. Given this track record, we should avoid precarity becoming part of policy.'*

A systematic review and meta-analysis found that job insecurity is associated with higher risk of depression and anxiety. Precarity reduces the health and well-being of research staff, and their productivity with it. It harms not only individual researchers but research groups and programmes that have higher levels of brain drain as a result.

In terms of policy, research career frameworks are important for research staff. A number of policies have been proposed that take an "up-or-out" approach, whereby research staff have to progress to a higher level within a relatively short period of time or exit the system. Why is this problematic? Let us look at the "up" part of the up-or-out approach. Career progression is good but there is a lack of funding in place for research staff to progress, which means they use increasing amounts of labour hours, paid for by the taxpayer, chasing increasingly competitive grants that they are less likely to get.

Research staff who are generally least able to absorb risk are the ones who take on the bulk of the risk.

What about the “out” in the up-or-out approach? Some researchers may wish to stay within a particular role at a given level, drawing on years of experience to perform high-quality research, but risk being pushed out of the system when we take an up-or-out approach. The higher education research group proposed a funded research framework in the late 2000s. This is a model we should bring back.

A possible solution to enable research staff to continue contributing to academic research is for funding agencies and HEIs to put in place staff scientist positions and equivalent positions for arts and humanities, thereby creating alternative attractive career progression routes within academia. A report from the National Research Council, for example, recommends raising the salaries of research staff to “appropriately reflect their value and contribution to research”. Unless the career prospects for early career researchers are improved, we risk losing the talent that will be essential for our future progress across all areas of research.’

186.Mr. Jones stated *‘the student to staff ratio has a direct impact on the rankings but it affects much more than that. It affects the entire student experience because it affects the ability of lecturers and other staff to deliver on their contracts. It is very clear that this has a negative impact.’*

187.Mr. Marjoram explained *‘the Teachers Union of Ireland has negotiation rights on behalf of researchers in the institutes of technology and the technological universities. It has been a very difficult and arduous path to try to do what we want to do, namely, to improve and standardise the terms and conditions. What we want are terms and conditions that are directly comparable to those of lecturing staff, that is, the same kinds of contracts, the same level of permanency, the same pension rights and rights to leave and so on. It has not been easy and, after many years, we have not made the*

progress we wanted. There is a plethora of contracts, some of which do not have a pay scale but rather a single point where people stay for however long they remain in employment. Other than that, there are those who have no pension arrangements made for them whatsoever. Bizarrely, some of the funding that comes in comes from the funding body with 20% added onto the salary portion for a pension contribution, and that has been sent back in some cases, although we really do not understand why there is such a bureaucratic difficulty in doing anything with that money on the part of the host institution. We are trying to progress these issues, and while it is not easy to do, our intention is to continue with our negotiations and to try to improve the terms and conditions of researchers to a level comparable with those of lecturing staff.'

188.Mr Marjoram continued *'in Technological Universities, in particular, we want to see an expansion of research capacity, but not a hived-off or separated research activity that is disparate from lecturing. We think research and lecturing go together, and that is one reason it is a good idea to have comparable terms and conditions in order that there can be interchange and there can be a time in an academic's life when there is a greater focus on one than the other. The closer together the contracts are, the easier that is to do.'*

189.Professor Rogers stated *'as noted by the IUA, the role of universities was pivotal throughout the pandemic. The advanced skills and research knowledge in our third level system and the flexibility in which it was applied underpinned much of the response to the pandemic, both nationally and across the globe. Without proper recognition and funding of the expertise, knowledge and capacity to innovate that is inherent in the sector, such responses to future crises may not be possible. We must ensure the funding model for higher education properly recognises the role of universities in research, innovation and scholarship, as well as in the education of the next generation of leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs.'*

190.Dr. Kennedy stated *'from the point of view of precarious workers I would like to see some real thought put into career paths for people who are on temporary contracts. In other words, what is their route out of precarity. Let us not have people sit for a decade or more and there are so many examples of that in this halfway house.'*

On the issue of women [in research], I reiterate that according to our published research up to two thirds of precarious academics are women. So, this situation always weighs far more heavily on women and on ethnic minorities. In my view, any institution or Government that relies heavily on precarious employment cannot say that they support gender or racial equality because those are just empty words if one's actions say a different thing.'

191.Dr. Younus stated *'we believe the entire university staff should be represented on academic committees and universities' management platforms. Those in postdoctoral positions, teaching assistants and minority staff, especially, are often not represented when important decisions in university are made. Precarious, hourly-paid representatives need to be at departmental meetings, networking events, committee meetings and sit at the decision-making table. They play a vital role in supporting the development of higher education in Ireland and their voices should be heard.'*

192.Dr. Kennedy also remarked *'high-quality teaching requires somebody with high-quality research skills. However, those of us who are on these temporary contracts are not paid a cent for our research. We are not even given support to go to conferences. We are not given any paid time off to research. If, however, we want to have any hope of getting permanent posts, we have to produce high-quality research that gets published in major journals or by major publishers or we have to attract one of the very small number of important grants. We are not given any financial support to do this almost impossible task.'*

193. When asked what he believed motivated HEIs to employ people precariously, Dr. Kennedy stated *'it goes beyond Government funding because there has been significant spend on campus redevelopment, directors of global engagement and non-academic staff. I am not saying this is wasted money but it reflects priorities I question because institutions are relying on the fact that there will be an infinite pool of people who are qualified to teach and who they can get for these bargain basement rates. Frankly, we have to question the spending priorities of the institutions, as well as raising the issue of Government funding. That is what I hope to do.'*

194. Dr. Younas agreed this issue *'was not as severe in STEM subjects as humanities, but it is there.'*

195. Dr. Younus further stated *'this problem of hourly-paid contracts is there in STEM subjects in UCD and TCD. Although, every year, one sees some permanent positions advertised, the problem is the boxes that one has to tick to get into that puts researchers such as myself at a significant disadvantage. I would not have so many publications because of my short-term contracts. Postdocs are just two years and they are there in order that one develops one publication and teaching profile. UCD does not give postdoc teaching contracts anymore which is the right call. Hourly-paid lecturers, as Dr. Kennedy said, do not get a penny for research. How does one expect someone who will apply to a permanent position to tick all the boxes when one does not give that person the adequate supports to do so? That is a big problem.'*

196. Dr. Kennedy stated *'there is this feeling of being absolutely invisible with regard to permanent colleagues, with regard to their own research and, as the Senator said, in the governance of institutions and having their concerns not taken account of. Second, there is also the great fear of speaking up because if people speak up about poor conditions, they are not given more work, or at least that is the fear that people have. That comes up again and again in the interviews. Perhaps I am taking a risk by being here today, but that is one big*

reason. Precarity produces a very disciplined workforce and that is one of the reasons it is very popular in institutions.'

RECOMMENDATIONS: RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

16. The issues of Staffing Levels and Precarious Employment in both the traditional and Technological Universities need to be reviewed urgently or by end of 2022 at the latest by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, in liaison with the Universities. Staffing Levels have not increased in line with extra students, courses and increased services provided by Third Level Institutes and, so, there needs to be an analysis / workforce plan of staffing requirements to restore staff levels. In addition, the Employment Control Framework is completely arbitrary and needs to be abolished. The aim must be to ensure there are sufficient staff at all grades to deal with the projected increase of students, extra courses and increased services. Regarding Precarious Employment, the Review should include an examination of Hourly Paid Academic Contracts, Researchers, Postgraduate Workers and outsourcing of Support staff roles.
17. Ring fenced funding should be provided by the Exchequer through the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for independent research, to include doctoral and post doctoral research. The aim of this is to avoid a reliance on funding through short term commercial research projects.

CHAPTER 8 – MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SUPPORTS

197. In oral evidence, on 5 April 2022, Dr. Joseph Duffy, CEO, Jigsaw, stated *‘what is crystal clear to us in Jigsaw is that increased investment is now needed if we are to make a real, meaningful difference to the mental health and well-being of Ireland’s young people and give them the best possible chance at a full and healthy future. The students of today are our future professionals, parents, politicians and One Good Adult who, in turn, will go on to support the mental health of future generations of young people.’*

198. In oral evidence, on 5 April 2022, Ms Trish Murphy, Acting Director of the Student Counselling Service and Student Learning Development, Trinity College Dublin, representing the Irish Council for Psychotherapy, stated *‘mental illness is likely to surface in the ages from 17 to 25 and therefore is also likely to present in the student population. Increasing diversity in third level also means that students with pre-existing mental, physical and emotional needs are attending colleges and our international student population has significantly grown. All this points to the pressure on services at third level, including health, counselling and disability services. These are the primary points of contact for young people of that age in this country. A decrease in stigmatisation of mental health issues plus increasing anxiety and academic pressure to do well have all been factors in the huge rise in demand for counselling service and even the private sector is having huge difficulty in meeting the surge in need.’*

199. The USI pointed out there are many research studies highlighting postgraduate intellectual and social isolation. It stated that mental health issues for postgraduates are inevitable and specific mental health supports for postgraduates would benefit this cohort. It reported that the National PGR student survey²⁰ results found only 36 % are aware of the various student

²⁰ [National Post Graduate Researcher Survey 2021](#)

supports available (recreation, healthcare, counselling, etc.), only 47% of students mostly or definitely agreed that they have frequent opportunities to discuss their research with other research students, only 44% of students mostly or definitely agreed that they have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond their department, only 45% of students mostly or definitely agreed that there is someone in their institution they can talk to about their day to-day problems.

200.The USI proposed positive student mental health and wellbeing be a fundamental element to the overall student experience. The USI reported student mental health has been worsening over the years, particularly with many students struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic. It opined that professional mental health supports are crucial in supporting students through college and that on-campus student mental health services are under-resourced and underfunded, resulting in long waiting lists. It noted research shows that supporting student mental health can improve academic performance, retention, and graduation rates.

201.The USI also noted students with mental health problems were twice as likely to leave higher education without graduating. USI proposed a whole campus approach to supporting student mental health which involves collaboration between support services and key stakeholders within the institution. It proposed cross collaboration between counselling services, disability services, health units, GP's, mental health nurses, psychiatrists, lecturing staff who are trained in mental health awareness and wellbeing coordinators, both on and off campus.

202.Professor Rogers stated *'support for mental health and well-being is a critically important issue in universities for both students and staff. The challenges posed by the transition to higher education are diverse. Research indicates that many of the serious mental health issues first emerge in the undergraduate entrants age group. It is important that there are appropriate policies, protocols and procedures in place for mental health, critical incidents*

and the appropriate use of emergency response teams. These policies should be linked to wider policies on the student experience so that an institution-wide approach is adopted and embedded in the campus culture. It must also be recognised that universities are part of a broader societal context. While they provide mental health and well-being supports, they are not well placed to provide services and supports that are best delivered through the HSE. The national student mental health and suicide prevention framework for Ireland calls for an embedded whole-system approach and higher education institutions will only be effective in this area if supports are provided at whole-sector level.'

203.Dr. Smyth stated *'on the mental health issue, I agree it is not a matter of ad hoc supports. Within institutions we need embedded supports, from broad-brush supports for many to more intensive supports for the few who need them. However, there are broader issues concerning child, adolescent and adult community mental health services and underfunding. The Sharing the Vision mental health policy has a lovely vision of covering the spectrum of supports but that requires very significant investment. I would have very grave concerns, given the patterns we saw in the Growing Up in Ireland study, that those young people will experience scarring effects that will predispose them to mental health difficulties going forward. That will have an impact on their educational and employment outcomes, as well as their health and well-being. It is a matter of urgency when we see that more than half of 22-year-old women are experiencing difficulties above the depression threshold. That is very concerning.'*

204.Dr. Duffy stated *'internationally, evidence points to increasing severity and complexity of mental health difficulties among third level students. Emerging international research also indicates that the Covid-19 pandemic, and its associated consequences have had a disproportionately negative effect on the mental health of third level students. At Jigsaw, we have experienced this at first hand, where more and more young people aged 18 to 25 are seeking*

the services of Jigsaw throughout the country and online, but long before Covid, the indicators were not positive.'

205. Dr. Duffy further stated *'what is clear is the current landscape of mental health and well-being supports for students across higher education institutions, HEIs, nationally is fragmented and inconsistent in nature. We know that not all HEIs have fully documented guidance on key areas such as mental health policy or protocols for responding to students in distress. Where such guidance does exist, it is not always clear how it is implemented in practice or embedded in campus life. Far too often, HEIs rely on the efforts of individual staff members or student bodies rather than adopting a coherent, campus-wide approach. At Jigsaw, we believe it is imperative a whole-of-campus, collaborative approach is needed, part of which will include the active participation of students and the move towards embedding well-being within the curricula. This must be a core component of the educational journey of all students.'*

206. In oral evidence, on 5 April 2022, Mr. Michael Ryan, National Head of Mental Health Engagement and Recovery, Health Service Executive (HSE), stated *'the role and function of mental health engagement and recovery is to ensure the experience of service users, family members, carers and their supporters informs the design, delivery and evaluation of our mental health services. This is achieved through co-production processes and ensures the personal lived and recovery experience of service users, family members and carers is used as a service improvement and therapeutic resource within services. The work of engagement and recovery is central to achieving the person-centred and recovery-orientated service set out in our national policy, Sharing the Vision. The contemporary understanding of recovery is that of an individual achieving a meaningful life and realising personal goals and ambitions regardless of the presence or severity of his or her mental health challenges. A recovery-orientated service is one that facilitates an individual in achieving those recovery goals through the provision of clinical excellence and is informed by lived mental health and recovery experience.'*

207. In oral evidence, on 5 April 2022, Dr. Joseph Morning, Mental Health Content Editor, SpunOut, stated *'findings from the seminal My World Survey 2 highlight that poor student mental health is a pervasive and problematic issue in Ireland. Roughly one fifth of the Irish student population experiences severe depression and anxiety and more than 10% of students reported a suicide attempt. Research conducted since the Covid-19 pandemic indicates further deterioration in student mental health. These findings reflect what we see on the ground. Since the start of 2021, our 50808 text support service has engaged in more than 2,000 conversations with young texters relating to further or higher education. Anxiety featured as an issue in 43% of these conversations, while 38% of texters talked to us about stress, 21% about isolation, and 15% shared that they were having thoughts of suicide.'*

208. Dr. Morning continued stating *'transitions are particularly important, particularly in respect of youth mental health. We are aware that the transition from primary school to secondary school is a key stressor for young people. The same is the case with the transition from secondary school to third level, if that occurs.'*

One of the points I was making in my opening statement was on the importance of including well-being in the curricula. It is hugely important to do that within the second level system in order to enable and support young people who can have the skills, the wherewithal and the confidence to apply for third level. That is a really big issue. When one reads some of the reports and research that has been done, they looked at those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Their experience was that they were relying on a teacher or a career guidance counsellor, or somebody else, to help them to think about their career choices. How do we ensure that they have the competence to do that? My main point would be to think about not just the funding of higher education separately, it is also about thinking about the supports at second level. Once they funnel in the supports, early intervention and prevention are key.'

WELLBEING SUPPORTS AND MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES

209.Mr. Ryan reported *‘the trends in mental health and health generally in WHO statistics and so on are that lifestyle-related issues are becoming the predominant challenges, pandemic aside, to mental health. The response has to incorporate a much stronger upskilling of people to self-manage, build resilience and learn how to manage their mental health more. It relates to the point about early intervention. If we teach people skills as early as we can to manage and improve their mental health, it will not stop everybody going to a more acute phase, but it will certainly help. That is what we mean by the recovery approach.’*

210.The USI stated that wellbeing supports are crucial in shaping the student experience and supporting their journey through college. It further stressed there is a need to invest into more wellbeing supports such as Counselling Services, Disability Support Services, mental health nurses, wellbeing initiatives and wellbeing coordinators. It also remarked that targeted initiatives to support consent education and drug harm reduction are equally as important.

211.The National Apprenticeship Office reported progress in promoting positive mental health within the apprenticeship community. It cited the *R U OK?* Campaign which encourages apprentices, teachers and employers to have healthy conversations about mental health.

212.El noted learners and providers need to be supported to build resilience to address challenges they will inevitably face, such as Covid-19. It stated that investing in theses support will help learner’s performance, behavior, social integration, and satisfaction. It also opined that Wellbeing improves providers ability to face challenges, engage learners, manage performance, and respond to challenges.

213.Ms. Murphy asked *‘should we embed resilience in the curriculum? Of course we should. It would be wonderful, but will it lower the numbers of*

students attending student counselling? I really do not know. What we are dealing with is quite serious. Of course we should do resilience. If we can, we should put credits in for it. I am not sure, however, that it would reduce the actual numbers of students attending counselling. That would take a while to work its way through, to be honest.'

214.Ms. Smyth commented *'we have talked an awful lot about firefighting and responding when the impact has happened but we need to do our best to eliminate it as best we can, to identify it and not to be afraid to have conversations, for schools to feel empowered to have those conversations and not worry about how this will reflect on them as a school or as a teaching environment so that everybody can have open conversations. We need a bit of both. It is both preventative but also being supportive. It still comes back to relations and what Jigsaw says – I have quoted Jigsaw for many years – about the importance of one good adult. Much of the work I do is actually not just about what I do with that young person, it is who can I support around them, who is the adult who can be there on Friday at 8 p.m. when the young person feels lonely because nobody has asked him or her out, or on Sunday evening before school. They are far more effective. If we support the families and carers about managing anxiety in the environment and in the moment when it happens, we will have a far more effective approach than sitting with me for an hour in a room.'*

LIVED EXPERIENCE SUPPORTS

215.Mr. Ryan reported *'we continue to develop a lived experience cohort to our workforce through the introduction of peer support working on multidisciplinary teams and through our recovery education and recovery college structures in partnership with our NGO colleagues in Mental Health Ireland. Recovery education is about empowering service users, family members, carers, staff and other stakeholders to an enhanced knowledge of recovery and their role in achieving recovery, whether for themselves or in supporting or facilitating others to do so. In 2022 we expect to have approximately 130 experts by experience working directly in the HSE mental health services. I am one of*

those. Engagement and recovery also oversees the individual placement and support, IPS, programme, which supports people with long-term and enduring mental health challenges to find meaningful work. According to our latest figures, more than 1,000 people are registered in the IPS programme and 441 people have secured meaningful employment since the start of the programme.'

216.Mr. Brown further reported *'in a contemporary mental health service, lived experience is an expertise that is essential to the delivery of services that provide maximum opportunities for individuals to recover. This expertise, in the context of providing a recovery-orientated service, is comparable to other forms of expertise such as clinical, social, occupational etc.'*

PEER-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

217.Dr. Duffy stated *'at Jigsaw, we fully acknowledge the complexities of addressing mental health and well-being in HEIs, but we believe promoting student mental health and well-being requires much more than a functioning student counselling service. We need to work collaboratively to address the current fragmented and inconsistent nature of mental health and well-being support available to students to avoid duplication and ensure equitable access to an integrated mental health support system that best meets the needs of all students. Given the diversification of the student profile in recent years, it is crucial to ensure a range of targeted mental health supports and services are also provided to meet effectively the needs of students who may be considered more at risk. The valuable roles students play in the lives of one another need to be nurtured. Peer-based mental health and well-being programmes should be further developed and expanded and become a key feature of HEIs.'*

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCING

218.Dr. Morning stated *‘we need the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to create more training places for clinical, counselling, and educational psychologists and to pay the associated fees for all trainees to ensure an equitable opportunity. We also need more mental health nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, occupational therapists and other allied health professionals.’*

219.Mr. Smyth reported *‘a petition of more than 2,400 signatories joined the PSI’s continued calls for the disparity in funding for psychology trainees to be addressed by Government. Currently, trainee clinical psychologists have 60% of their fees paid and receive a student salary, while counselling and educational psychology trainees in third level pay fees of approximately €14,000 per year and complete three years of unpaid work throughout the duration of their studies and training in university.’*

The PSI has highlighted to Government for the past three years in pre-budget submissions and direct correspondence to Government Ministers and the Taoiseach that one of the greatest barriers to getting qualified psychologists into the workforce is the inequity of counselling and educational trainees having to self-fund for the full period of their doctoral training, as well as pay €14,000 per year in university fees. This results in many not being able to afford to enter the profession, or a select few who can afford to self-fund, which risks the psychological workforce not being representative of the full socioeconomic spectrum of the community they represent and support. We have advocated with Minister, Deputy Harris to work with the PSI to find ways to alleviate the burden of fees on trainee psychologists in third level education.

Thus far, the PSI has been met with deafening silence from Government on additional funding. How should the PSI understand that, on one hand, we hear regular statements in the media and Dáil about the need to support the

mental health needs of our population but, on the other hand, we have had no engagement whatsoever from Government about increasing the numbers of professionally trained psychology places in third level.'

220.Dr. Morning further remarked *'it is difficult to measure reductions in referrals to mental health services, which is one of the things we would hope to get from preventative approaches, if the numbers are increasing anyway in the face of increased pressures on mental health.*

It is about constant tracking. We want to capture the more qualitative data and person-centred picture of the impact these programmes are having. One of the main aims should be changing the campus culture. We know that an important protective factor is help seeking. There are barriers to help seeking in third level education. A lot of students do not feel comfortable in reaching out and postpone doing so. Capturing the changes in attitudes is difficult, but it is one of the things we would want to change.'

221.Dr. Duffy stated *'in terms of talking about a lifelong approach, in Jigsaw the aim is to help people have a healthy transition into adulthood. That transition might be through finishing full-time education after secondary school and then doing an apprenticeship, attending third level or a lot of other different things. If we think about what we want as a country for our young people, we want [...] young people to be resilient and robust and to be able to contribute very positively to all areas of life.*

[...] The original idea of a university was education of the whole person. [...] We have done that very well in terms of thinking about access programmes and how to support people, in particular in terms of the traditional view of education. How do we support someone much more psychologically in coming into third level and starting that much earlier?

Going back to what we said at the beginning, this involves thinking about particular targeted cohort of groups, intersectionality and who is under-

represented and how we will support them in terms of being represented. On the argument made earlier about a certain homogeneity, how do we support other entries into the sector? We need to talk within secondary level about developing a career as a psychotherapist or psychologist and so on. How do we encourage people to do that rather than seeing it as a middle-class phenomenon only open to certain groups of people?’

222.Dr. Morning further commented ‘a lot of fruitful output can come from collaborations between organisations like SpunOut, Jigsaw and universities. Our student cohorts are diversifying, including in how they engage with their education. It makes sense that we should also diversify how they engage with mental health support. We should have a diverse range because not every type of support will work for every student. Some will have preferences. Some types of interventions or support services will work better for some than others.

It is important to have options. They can come through collaboration. Sometimes it is as simple as universities being aware of the other opportunities and support that are out there. That comes from joined up working and having clear lines of communication. That applies to further and higher education but is also one of the keys to solving transition periods and getting the transition from secondary school to further and higher education right. It is about joining up, communicating, working together and having a person-centred approach.’

223.Mr. Smyth expanded by stating ‘we also need the different parts of the system to be able to talk to each other. We should be encouraged to have meetings about how we work together. That is not the case because we are expected to firefight. We are left to decide whether to cancel appointments and not meet with young people so we can work with a service to improve the systems or to meet the young people and not get that pressure. Invariably, clinicians will choose the latter. There needs to be a mandate that directs services to work together because otherwise we will continue what we have

done before, which is to work in silos in isolation, and be restricted in opportunities such as this, where we actually get to talk to each other. The parts of the system need to come together to improve the experiences of the young people.'

224.Mr. Smyth stated *'there are indeed those higher-level pieces about Covid-19 and Ukraine etc. However, for me working with teenagers, and it touches on what Mr. Ryan said, the main anxiety they have is relational: am I good enough, do I fit in, do I have friends, do I have family. They are the main things they worry about. Obviously bullying is one of those things that directly impedes that because the impact of bullying behaviour is "you are not good enough". Many people already inherently have that sense of "I am not good enough" and bullying reinforces that. I think Dr. Morning is right about that age of 17 being the time when significant mental health challenges arise.*

What I see is similar to what Dr. Morning said on transitions. At 13 years old young people moving from a primary school where they are relatively well protected. There is one teacher and there is predictability. In secondary education young people have 11 teachers, different classrooms and they are the youngest again and the question is how to fit in. There are different rules and different expectations of what is good enough. We see the early impacts of exclusion, bullying and not fitting in at 13 years old later on when they get to 14, 15, 16 and 17 years old. It is coming back to those pieces. We need counselling supports when those things have happened but we also need to prevent them.'

225.Dr. Morning stated *'it is very important to note that around age 17 is when you see these more obvious manifestations of mental health difficulties. Much of the time they are preceded by subclinical forms or warning signs as these conditions begin to develop. We know from research that things such as adverse childhood experience, which would cover things such as bullying, increase one's risk. When talking about having universal preventative approaches that kind of focus on social aspects like within the family and so*

on, more targeted preventative and early intervention approaches can identify those who are at increased because of previous experience; that can be a very important piece of the puzzle.'

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

226. In its submission, the Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education (PCHEI) stated *'research has indicated college students are now significantly lonelier since the onset of the pandemic. A comparison of rates of loneliness in groups from 31,000 participants in the United Kingdom between 2017-2019 and 60,000 during the pandemic found that being a student was only a moderate risk factor for feelings of extreme loneliness pre-pandemic but was associated with a much greater risk during the pandemic.'*²¹ It was also noted *no other population group showed such dramatic increases. This finding is particularly potent in the context that student loneliness has been found to predict mental health outcomes particularly in relation to depression and anxiety.*²²

Since the re-opening of campuses in September 2021, SCSs are reporting increase in demand for services ranging from 50% to 100% increase from the same period in 2020. Students are primarily seeking in-person counselling, having been starved of personal contact for much of the preceding 18 months.'

RECOMMENDATIONS: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SUPPORTS

18. The valuable role students play in the lives of one another needs to be nurtured. The Higher Education Authority (HEA), with Health Service Executive (HSE) support, should develop a Peer-based Mental Health and

²¹ Bu, F., Steptoe, A., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Who is lonely in lockdown? Cross-cohort analyses of predictors of loneliness before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Public Health, 186, 31-34.](#)

²² Richardson, T., Elliott, P., & Roberts, R. (2017). Relationship between loneliness and mental health in students. [Journal of Public Mental Health.](#)

Wellbeing Programme that can be rolled out to all Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s. The Programme should be developed so that it can adapted to the needs of individual HEIs and complement Programmes already in place.

19. The ratio of counsellors available in Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s should be at the recommended international standard of 1 counsellor to 1,000 students. To this end, ring fenced funding should be made available for the expansion of student counselling services.
20. All Higher Education Institutions (HEI)s should be designated as Places of Sanctuary and actively support student health and well being with a specific focus on vulnerable groups including displaced students seeking refuge in this country.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

Written submissions were received from the following organisations and individuals.

All submissions are available [here](#):

1. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
2. Conradh na Gaeilge
3. Dr Niall Kennedy, Trinity College Dublin
4. Dr. Aedín Doris, Department of Economics, Maynooth University
5. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)
6. Enterprise Ireland
7. Foras na Gaeilge
8. Foróige
9. FÓRSA
10. Gael Linn
11. Higher Education Authority (HEA)
12. Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA)
13. IDA (Investment and Development Agency)
14. Institute of Physics
15. Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)
16. Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
17. Irish Council for Psychotherapy
18. Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT)
19. Irish Precarity Network.
20. Irish Research Council (IRC)
21. Irish Research Staff Association
22. Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU)
23. Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME)
24. Irish Universities Association (IUA)
25. Jigsaw
26. Mental Health Engagement & Recovery, (MHER), HSE
27. Mental Health Ireland
28. Mr. Tim Horgan, Head of Faculty of Engineering & Science, Munster Technological University (MTU)

29. Ms Bríd Horan, Chair of the Dublin City University Governing Authority
30. Ms Marian Duggan, Vice President, Academic Affairs & Registrar/ VP Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Technological University of the Shannon Midlands Midwest (TUS)
31. National Apprenticeships Planning Office
32. Professor Mark Rogers, Registrar and Vice President for Academic Affairs, University College Dublin (UCD)
33. Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education (PCHEI)
34. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
35. Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)
36. SOLAS
37. SpunOut
38. Students' Union Hibernia College Dublin and Students' Union, Dublin Business School
39. Teacher's Union of Ireland (TUI)
40. Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
41. The Psychological Society of Ireland
42. Union of Students Ireland (USI)
43. Waterford Institute of Technology
44. Women in Research Ireland (WIRI)

APPENDIX 2: ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS

On 22 February 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with the Irish Universities Association (IUA); the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA); and the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA).

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 1 March 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI); the Higher Education Authority (HEA); SOLAS; and the National Apprenticeships Planning Office.

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 8 March 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI); the Union of Students in Ireland (USI); the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU); the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT); the Irish Research Staff Association; and FÓRSA.

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 22 March 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Ms Marian Duggan, Vice President, Academic Affairs & Registrar/ VP Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Technological University of the Shannon Midlands Midwest (TUS); Mr. Tim Horgan, Head of Faculty of Engineering & Science, Munster Technological University (MTU); Dr. Aedín Doris, Department of Economics, Maynooth University; Professor Mark Rogers, Registrar and Vice President for Academic Affairs, University College Dublin (UCD); and Ms Bríd Horan, Chair, DCU Governing Authority.

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 29 March 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with the Irish Research Council (IRC); Science Foundation Ireland (SFI); Women in Research Ireland (WIRI); the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC); the Irish

Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME); the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI); and the Irish Precarity Network.

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 5 April 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with the Health Service Executive Mental Health Services; SpunOut; Jigsaw; the Irish Psychological Society; and the Irish Council for Psychotherapy.

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 17 May 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with the Chairs of Technological University of Shannon Midlands Midwest (TUS); Munster Technological University (MTU); and South East Technological University (SETU).

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

On 24 May 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with representatives from WorldSkills Ireland and Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The debate can be accessed [here](#)

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