

# General Election 2020

## IFUT – Five Steps to Revive Higher Education

**IFUT calls on all parties forming the next government to adopt the following as part of the Programme for Government:**

- 1. Phase out student fees and revise the grant system to address the excessive costs for so many in, or contemplating entering, Higher Education.**
- 2. Deliver on the funding requirements in the 2016 Cassells Report, which specifies €600m in the five years to 2021 with a further €1b over the following decade.**
- 3. Progressively tackle precarious work practices to ensure decent and fairly paid work becomes a hallmark of publicly funded education.**
- 4. Tackle the grossly inadequate Student:Lecturer ratio in higher education to bring Ireland in line with OECD average ratios.**
- 5. Confirm commitment to Section 14(2) of the Universities Act, 1997, to guarantee academic freedom in our universities.**

Ireland's higher education system has enabled our economic and social development over many decades.

The decision to sacrifice funding of higher education following the 2008 recession has seriously undermined the sector. Despite recent economic recovery there has been a wholly inadequate response from government to the ever-escalating crisis and the needs of universities, students and staff alike. Student numbers alone soared from 78,000 to over 120,000 since the start of the decade.

Urgent action is needed now. The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) is therefore proposing the following key steps:

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## 1. Addressing Student Hardship

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For many students and their families, the annual cost of living while in higher education has become prohibitive. Shortage of affordable accommodation in major education and population centres adds to the crisis and prevents many young people from engaging in higher education.

- **IFUT calls on all parties forming the next government to phase out student fees and to revise the grant system to address the increasing costs, including the soaring accommodation costs, that are unmanageable to many, in or contemplating entering Higher Education.**

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## 2. Funding of Higher Education

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The third level sector is grossly underfunded. The situation has deteriorated very significantly both during and since the years of recession.

- **IFUT calls on all parties forming the next government to adequately fund higher education, to deliver the funding requirements outlined in the Cassells Report, which specifies the need for €600m to be invested in the five years to 2021 with a further €1bn over the following decade.**

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## 3. Decent Terms and Conditions of Employment for those working within the Sector

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Early career academics, particularly Researchers, are generally engaged on short fixed-term contracts without prospects of career progression. These 'externally funded' contracts of employment don't generally lead to permanent or secure employment.

- **IFUT calls on all parties forming the next government to progressively tackle precarious work practices in the sector. A 'Task Force' or 'Expert Group' should be formed to develop recommendations for Government across Higher Education. It could replicate the Expert Group on Fixed-Term and Part-Time Employment in Lecturing in Third Level Education in Ireland, 2016 but look across all grades of staff engaged in Higher Education.**
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## 4. The Student : Lecturer Ratio

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Staffing embargoes and underfunding means that student to academic staff ratios are currently 20.6:1, worse than figures outlined over half a century ago in the Report of the Commission on Higher Education (1967). The student-staff ratio at third level in Ireland is the fourth highest in the OECD, where the average is 16:1.

- **IFUT calls on all parties forming the next government to recognise and address this and to commit to commencing on a trajectory in the short-term that will bring Ireland in line with the OECD average in the lifetime of the next government. Improving the student to academic staff ratios will lead to a significant improvement in the quality of education and the 'student experience'.**

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## 5. Academic Freedom

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Academic staff in higher education and research continue to face increasing threats to academic freedom, which includes the freedom to conduct research, teach, speak and publish without interference or penalty.

- **IFUT calls on all parties to confirm their commitment to Section 14(2) of the Universities Act, 1997 (*A member of the academic staff of a university shall have the freedom, within the law, in his or her teaching, research and any other activities either in or outside the university, to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions and shall not be disadvantaged, or subject to less favorable treatment by the university, for the exercise of that freedom.*)**
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