



**Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) opening statement to
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and
Science to make a submission as part of the Committee's examination of the topic "*Future Funding
of Higher Education*".
(March 8th 2022)**

Introduction

The TUI would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make this submission on the topic of future funding of higher education.

Overview

The issue of funding of higher education has been a complex one for many years but has come to the fore especially since cutbacks of the last decade, combined with rapidly rising student numbers and the publication in 2016 of *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education*, which will hereafter be referred to as the Cassells Report.

Funding Model for Higher Education

It is important to note that in 2021, Ireland only spent 0.9% of GDP on tertiary education, compared to 1.4% in the OECD. The ratio of students to teachers in Irish tertiary education is also very significantly above both the OECD and EU averages and has risen dramatically, from already unsustainable levels, in the last year. The funding deficit, even aside from anything to do with Covid-19, will get worse in coming years as, mentioned in earlier hearings of the Committee, student numbers are expected to rise by almost thirty thousand in tertiary education in this decade.

Even without an increase in student numbers over the next decade, the third level budget is forty percent (approximately €100 million) off where we were ten years ago (Irish Times, January 23rd, 2020). The Cassells report made clear that €600m was needed by 2021. However, we're now in 2022 and little has changed.

The 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 28% and staff numbers fell 8%.

The CSO has found that between 2007 and 2016, real expenditure per student at third level education decreased over 34% in nine years. The TUI believes that third level education, as part of the social contract, should be funded from government revenues; that is, from taxation. Whence that taxation comes is then the issue. For its part, TUI has made the serious proposal that a 1% levy should be applied to corporation profits in order to generate a dedicated fund for higher education. Why, we may be asked, should corporate profits be levied in this manner? For the very simple reason that to do so is fair and, indeed, provides those corporations with an opportunity clearly to demonstrate what they claim to have but what is little in evidence, that is commitment to the society in which they base their enterprise. These corporations benefit hugely from having available to them a very deep pool of graduate talent in this country – supplied courtesy of the Irish tax payer. In 2015 for example, the levy we suggest would have yielded some €550 million - an investment that would have done very nicely indeed in terms of resuscitating the exhausted and gaunt figure that is the Irish third level education system.

Investment in the further education and training sector also needs to be addressed. Priorities in the Programme for Government can only be adequately addressed if accompanied by additional funding. Areas such as Youthreach, adult literacy, post-leaving certificate programmes etc have for too long been a 'Cinderella' of the system. The Committee acknowledged the need for additional funding of the FET sector in its hearings of March 1st.

Future Expansion of the Technological Universities

It is important that all IoTs have the opportunity to become TUs if that is the wish of the community concerned. It is imperative that the two remaining IoTs, IADT and DkIT, are expedited into the Technological University sector. TUI members in both institutes have communicated to management, DFHERIS, the HEA and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, their wish to move towards Technological University designation. This position is supported by the TUI nationally. DkIT are currently being assisted by the HEA in this regard.

Distinctive Features of the IoT/TU Sector

The HEA has found that 15% of graduates from IoTs attended DEIS schools compared to just 8% of university graduates. 7% of IoT graduates attended fee paying schools compared to 13% of university graduates.

According to Thorn, the IoTs have 22% of their students registered as flexible learners (part-time, distance and e-learning) compared to 17% for the universities. The distinction comes in terms of socio-economic class: 31% of students in the institutes come from the non-manual, semi-skilled or unskilled group compared to 21% in the universities.

Recommendations

The TUI would like to make the following recommendations to the Committee:

- The size of SUSI grants, and eligibility criteria for same, should be significantly expanded. The TUI welcomes the current ongoing review of SUSI.
- Exchequer funding of higher education must be dramatically increased. This could be partly funded by a one-percentage point increase in Corporation Tax with the proceeds ringfenced for funding HE.
- Staff/student ratios need to be reduced urgently.
- Apprenticeships should have greater support and visibility.
- Funding models must take account of the unique role the IoT/TU sector plays in higher education access.
- Greater recognition of, and visibility of, the FE sector is vital due to the essential role it plays in supporting under-represented groups to access levels 5 and 6 of the NFQ, and also frequently then accessing levels 7 and 8 of the NFQ.
- Additional staffing of guidance services in schools, FE colleges, HE institutions and in the Adult Guidance Service would be helpful.
- The Points System needs to be reformed.
- More progression pathways should be recognised.
- Additional support in the form of funding and staffing is required for student mental health support services in HEIs, as well as for employee assistance programmes.
- Further funding is required to support access programmes in HEIs.
- Strong consideration should be made to extending a DEIS-style funding model to the HE sector.
- All IoTs should consult staff in relation to seeking a pathway to TU status.

- ERTL is, by definition, an emergency response to a crisis situation. It cannot be seen in any other context.
- AEN students need should have additional supports maintained if they attend FE or HE after leaving the post-primary system. Currently when they leave second level support is effectively cut off and then needs to be re-established b the relevant FE or HE institution. The NCSE may have a role to play here, especially in the FE context.

Thank you to the Committee for listening to this opening statement. The TUI would be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have. The TUI would also like to direct you to the more extensive written submission that we made to the Committee in February, which provides more detail on the issues outlined above.

Ends

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