



**Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the invitation of the
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*".
(February 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.

The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff (21,000+) in Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach, institutes of technology and technological universities and those working in out of school services.

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.

The TUI notes that there is a tight restriction on the size of submission requested by the Committee and hence the TUI would strongly welcome the opportunity to address the Committee to expand on our necessarily brief submission in much greater detail. Each of the seven topics identified by the Committee have significant importance in their own right and require in-depth discussion.

Future Funding Model for Higher Education

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015; Government of Ireland 2019b; DCYA, 2020). The high birth rate in Ireland (CSO, 2017; Eurostat, 2017; Government of Ireland, 2019b) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future.

It is important to note that in 2019, and again in 2021, Ireland only spent 0.9% of GDP on tertiary education, compared to 1.4% in the OECD (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2021). 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 (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2021). The funding deficit, even aside from anything to do with Covid-19, will get worse in coming years as, similar to above, student numbers are estimated by the DES to rise by almost thirty thousand in tertiary education in this decade (DES, 2018). In terms of overall expenditure on education, Ireland and Greece were the only EU member states in 2015 to spend significantly less than the UN SDG 4 minimum of 4% of GDP on education (UNESCO, 2022).

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. The TUI would like to acknowledge the positive comments that Minister Harris made at a recent Education Futures seminar in relation to not wanting yet another committee to discuss the problems outlined in the Cassells report and that progress needed to be made on the issue in 2021. However, we're now in 2022.

According to the then CEO of the HEA “the scale of the funding challenge for higher education is enormous” and that spending on tertiary education in Ireland in 2018 was only three-quarters that of the OECD average (conference speech, Graham Love, June 13th, 2018). OECD/EU (2017) notes that student numbers in higher education are expected to grow 30% in the next fifteen years. It notes that state funding of HEIs was 76% of their total funding in 2007/08 but was only 51% of their total funding in 2015/16. The EUA (2021) 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%.

Exchequer funding of higher education is a true investment with a large return. OECD (2019) has found that the public net financial returns of a man attaining tertiary education is \$369k in Ireland, compared to an average of \$148k in the OECD and \$165k in the EU23. The equivalent figures for women are \$143k in Ireland, \$77k in the OECD and \$90k in the EU23. Investment in public goods such as tertiary education also has large public support. For example, a two-to-one majority of the public would prefer Government to spend money on public services rather than more tax cuts (Sunday Independent / Kantar MillwardBrown poll December 16th, 2018). Despite this CSO (2020) found that between 2007 and 2016, real expenditure per student at third level education decreased from €10,806

in 2007 to €7,089 in 2016, a drop of 34.4%. Some of the necessary additional funding for HE could be obtained, as recommended for many years by the TUI, by an increase of one percentage point in the rate of Corporation Tax with the proceeds ring-fenced for HE.

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.

As noted by Clarke, Kenny and Loxley (2015: 11), the third level sector "as a whole experienced a 29% reduction in funding (€385,688,801.00) from 2007 to 2014. When the funding is disaggregated per sector the cuts experienced were; IOTs 32% (-170,719,711.00), Universities 26% (-€200,610,172.00) and Colleges 24% (-€14,358,919.00). During the same period staffing numbers in the public sector were reduced by 10% (32,000)."

Croke Park hours, Haddington Road hours and flex hours in their various manifestations in higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to be a running sore in the education system. Education staff have always gone 'above and beyond' in supporting their students. However, box ticking exercises merely damage goodwill. Over recent years the TUI has made a number of agreements which have resulted in better use of the hours. However, the fact remains that these hours should be abolished and trust in the professionalism of lecturers restored.

Extend DEIS model to HEIs

There is a need to develop an increased funding model for IOT/TUs based on the deprivation indices of region in which they are located. This could be done by extending the DEIS designation system to third level, using the Pobal Deprivation Maps to designate IOT/TUs eligible for increased funding, decreased class size, extra access initiatives, increased apprenticeship funding and lifelong learning initiatives.

With the Pobal Deprivation score, it is possible to derive an objective measure of the socio-economic composition of each HEI, allowing for a DEIS designation to be assigned to an IOT/TU.

Disadvantaged student access rates are easy to measure, qualitative data on student outcomes from disadvantaged areas in the HEI sector could also be gathered. There is long-term expertise among IOT/TU staff in the sector, in employing innovative teaching and learning methodologies, arranging work placements, mentoring activities, and finding employment for graduates.

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.

Future Expansion of Craft Apprenticeships and New Generation Apprenticeships

The TUI strongly welcomes the greater focus on the value of apprenticeships recently and particularly welcomes recent announcements by Minister Harris of an expansion of apprenticeship places. It is also noteworthy that apprenticeships now extend up to level 10 on the NFQ. As part of this long sought and positive development the IOT/TU sector is playing a key role in supporting young people to access HE whilst also working in a paid job.

Access, Diversity and Inclusion to Include Digital Learning and Student Grant Support

As noted by the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* “as a country we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by increasing levels of participation in higher education”. The TUI believes that higher education (HE) should be available, as a public good, to all who want it. Traditionally some groups have been significantly under-represented amongst the HE student body. Social inclusion means that there must be equity of access. The TUI has long campaigned for the rights of those under-represented groups and continues to do so. Kovacic et al. (2021) note the extraordinarily high level of third-level education in Ireland. Indeed it is the fourth highest in the EU. However, the same study also notes that “a ratio of 4.9 students from disadvantaged areas to 10 students from affluent areas attend third-level” (Kovacic et al., 2021: 5).

In addition to students who enter higher education under access programmes, a significant number of entrants to third level colleges, particularly to the Institutes of Technology and Technological

Universities, initially undertake courses at Levels 6 and 7 on the National Qualifications Framework. Many of these students, in addition to induction support and foundation programmes, may require considerable and sometimes customised support to enable them to complete. HEIs need to be resourced adequately to provide and continue these supports. The absence of such supports will simply guarantee on-going and unnecessary attrition rates. Pastoral supports such as guidance counselling services in both post-primary and tertiary institutions are vital here. Supports for students with disabilities are also essential.

In post-primary, third level, and further and adult education settings, TUI members engaged in Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) for extended periods since March 2020. ERTL has been demonstrated to involve enormous, unsustainable educational, technical and workload challenges. Due to a range of issues, some students experience very significant difficulty in continuing to engage in education once it has been removed from the physical setting of the school, college or centre. The importance of the shared classroom environment and of the personal relationships and interactions at the heart of good educational practice cannot be overstated and their loss cannot be replaced. TUI members witnessed the impact of economic pressures on student engagement, not least in the great difficulties faced by some families and households in adapting their homes into suitable learning spaces in spite of their best efforts. The lack of appropriate devices and broadband access, both for educators and students, presented and continue to present severe limitations on what is possible, as do the lack of training and technical support. Learning resources, lesson plans and teaching strategies must be replaced or rewritten creating massive workload issues. All educational interactions become more time-consuming and more likely to need repetition and reinforcement. Feedback and assessment take place in new settings and formats, many needing to be newly created and taking significantly more time and work by educators. ERTL proved to be particularly challenging for under-represented student groups.

Given the extent and pace of developments in technology, constant revision and renewal of the government's strategy, priorities and investment is critical to enabling teaching and learning for 21st century skills and competences. The digital divide for students and staff, and the poor standard of broadband in many rural areas was clearly exposed by Covid-related disruption to in-class teaching in HEIs. A quantum jump in investment is now needed.

All Irish society is acutely conscious of the impact of Covid and its attendant losses in life, health, and employment. We must guard against losses in the social and cultural fabric that binds our nation together. In which connection, the work of TUI members, both in education and as trade unionists, is vital. Indeed, the crisis highlights the centrality of public service and collective effort to any well-ordered society. The TUI earnestly hopes that those newly awakened to this reality do not soon forget it. For our part, we pay tribute and thanks to fellow public servants, in healthcare, policing and education most particularly, and indeed to all workers engaged in the provision of essential services. TUI members have risen magnificently to the challenge of maintaining education of the highest standard. Education is our greatest equalising and unifying endeavour and in the face of enormous difficulties our members have continued to inspire curiosity and imagination, to release potential and to unfold opportunities and possibilities. The TUI will beware of any complacent, or indeed malign, assumption by Managements or Government that the extraordinary efforts made by education staff in response to the emergency form a template for future work. We will ensure that our no-precedent stipulations, and the written assurances from Government, Departments and Managements to the same effect, will be honoured. Emergency remote teaching and learning (ERTL) was indeed only an emergency measure. This was acknowledged by the Minister for Education in her address to TUI Congress in April 2021.

Lifelong Learning, Progression Pathways and Continuing Professional Development

A major objective of public policy is that a culture of life-long learning be fostered and facilitated. Central to this is the clear identification of and proactive promotion of multiple progression paths into and within higher education. However, Ireland continues to rely heavily on direct progression to third level from post-primary education to populate colleges and universities. To date, insufficient progress has been made in relation to mapping and formalising alternative routes. In particular, the TUI believes the recognition of prior learning including experiential learning and routes from post-primary and the workplace, through further education to higher education need to be further developed. The TUI hopes that the soon-to-be published NCCA report on Senior Cycle Review may be useful in this matter.

Publicly funded HEIs, especially the IoT/TU sector, have an important role in regional economic and social development. Not only do they provide vitally important, and locally relevant, educational and economic benefits but they are also significant economic hubs in their own right and often serve catchment areas that have suffered rural depopulation. HEIs must serve the public, and this includes equality of access for all groups to higher education opportunities. It also requires provision of multi-level programmes from NFQ 6 to 10, traditional under- and post-graduate programmes and short

programmes for upskilling and reskilling. HEIs must have progression routes that are recognised across the systems to facilitate Lifelong Learning of citizens in Ireland and within the European Union and the UK. Our public funded higher education systems should enhance citizens opportunities, increase understanding and tolerance, support democracy and enable mobility. As a professional education trade union, we are committed to supporting quality public funded education and recognised the benefits of education for the individual and society. The TUI is willing to engage in a consultation process exploring reform on behalf of our members and in consideration of the students, communities, enterprise, culture and sports, our members serve.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports

Guidance provision, including counselling supports, in the FET and HE sectors is under significant strain. Additional staffing is essential if students are to be able to access education fully. Supports for students with disabilities are also essential.

Benefits of Higher Education

According to the CSO (2018), Ireland has higher than average rates of third level attainment, and they have increased significantly between 2005 and 2015. In 2015, 52% of Irish 25–34-year-olds had completed third level education, compared with the OECD average of 42%. Overall, levels of third level attainment for Irish 25–64-year-olds have increased from 29% in 2005 to 43% in 2015 (OECD figures are 27% to 35% respectively). Entry rates (the proportion of people who are expected to enter third level during their lifetime) are also significantly higher in Ireland than across the OECD as a whole (81% vs 59% OECD for a Bachelor's Degree).

CSO Statistics (CSO, 2018) show that graduates from Irish higher education institutions experience relatively high rates of employment. In 2011, a CSO study noted that the unemployment rate for higher education graduates was 7%, and this compared with 18% for those with a post-Leaving Certificate qualification and 14% with a higher secondary education. Similarly, the employment rate for higher education graduates was 81%, compared with 64% for those with a post-Leaving Certificate qualification and 65% for those with higher secondary education only. Based on 2016 Q4 CSO Quarterly National Household Survey data, the unemployment rate for those with higher education was 3.7%. The figure was 9.2% for those with an upper secondary education and 12.7% for those with a lower secondary education. As with the OECD as a whole, Irish graduates have lower unemployment and higher employment rates than those without a third level qualification; and employment rates for graduates are in line with OECD averages (CSO, 2018). The same CSO report (2018) found that the

earnings advantage for third level education in Ireland was higher than the OECD average in 2015: on average third level graduates in Ireland earned 66% more than those with just an upper secondary education, compared to a differential of 60% across the OECD.

In a study in Ireland, Indecon (2019) found that the estimated net graduate premium (to the individual) of an undergraduate degree is €106,000 (€118k male and €96k female). The additional net graduate premium (over and above degree) for a taught Masters is €40k (Male €36k, female €44k) and €116k for a Ph.D. (€118k for a male and €115k for a female). For a representative student completing a full-time undergraduate degree the net Exchequer benefit is estimated at €62,000 (male €75k, female €51k), on average per graduate.

Distinctive Features of the IoT/TU Sector

According to Erskine, S. & Harmon, D. (2020: 11), “Institutes of Technology appear to be more willing to recognise competences and experiences outside of education than Universities in admitting students to their programmes.” Erskine, S. & Harmon, D. (2020: 55) also notes that “students in Institutes of Technology appear to get along better with their teaching staff than students in Universities. Similar patterns emerge for part-time students over full-time students, and for postgraduates over undergraduates”.

According to Liston et. al. (2018), IoTs have more male entrants than female (in contrast to the situation in the universities). Guidance education is important before and during all stages of education. On average 14% of students do not progress from one year of their course to the next. The rates are especially high in Level 6 and Level 7, and in the IoTs. However, there is no statistical difference in non-progression in the IoTs vis-à-vis the universities when you adjust for the more diverse student population in the IoTs. The strongest predictor of non-progression is prior educational attainment. Access to comprehensive guidance support, in school/FE/HE and community settings, can reduce the levels of non-completion of HE courses by students.

HEA (2019a) 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 (2018), 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 (Thorn, 2018).

As stated in Phulphagar & Kane (2020: 2)

“Over half of students enrolled in Institutes of Technology receive a SUSI grant...while between 35% and 45% of students in universities receive a SUSI grant.”

HEA (2019b) has found that 100% of universities have many more ‘affluent’ students than ‘disadvantaged’ students. In the case of the IoTs the same figure is just 29%.

Collins et al. (2020: 16) stated that

“Academics in the non-university sector do more teaching than their counterparts in the university sector. While academics in the non-university sector in Ireland spend less time on research than their counterparts in the universities, they outperform the European average for their sector in this regard.” This means that staff in the IoT/TU sector have less time to provide one-to-one support to students.

According to HEA (2017), there were 222,618 enrolments in higher education in Ireland in 2015/16. Universities had 1.73 times the staff of the IoT sector despite having only 1.33 times the number of students. The IoT/TU sector must be given its fair share of funding, so that it can truly meet its role both nationally and regionally.

Recommendations

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

- 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 by the relevant FE or HE institution. The NCSE may have a role to play here, especially in the FE context.

Ends

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Glossary

AEN	Additional Educational Needs
CAO	Central Applications Office
CSO	Central Statistics Office
ERTL	Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IoT	Institute of Technology
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
THEA	Technological Higher Education Association
TU	Technological University
TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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