

Irish Federation of University Teachers

Opening statement by Joan Donegan, General Secretary, Irish Federation of University Teachers to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science as part of the Committee's Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Higher Education Authority Bill, 2021.

I hope that all the members of this very important committee have, by now, had a chance to study the written submission which IFUT has already supplied to you.

Since my time today is limited to three-minutes I will extract from our submission those items which are of particular concern to IFUT and/or which are less likely to be dealt with by other parties invited to address you.

Governance:

The Bill's insistence that external representation should constitute a majority in the governance structures is a very negative development put forward without any coherent or sustainable justification.

Higher Education is different in kind from the provision of other services. The university enterprise has to do with ideas and concepts. Any drift towards giving overarching control to individuals primarily motivated by other concerns, whether business, social, or economic, is entirely inappropriate.

IFUT also wishes to emphasise that this part of the Bill, if enacted, will almost certainly, have the (possibly unintended) consequence of leaving less room for representatives of employees.

This would be completely counter to the policies of successive Irish governments **to enhance** worker participation and industrial democracy.

Valuing Original Research and Enhancing the Status of Researchers:

When Albert Einstein was developing his Theory of Relativity he is reported to have said that he believed there was only a handful of scholars in the world who understood his work or appreciated its value.

This reminds us that we must always take great care to ensure that primary research is valued and is not relegated to a subsidiary role to applied research. If Irish HEI's are to be seen as world class we must allow them to

be leaders in the search for **new** knowledge and not just the application of existing knowledge.

IFUT is very worried that we have allowed the belief to take hold that we can, as a nation, prioritise research while simultaneously subjecting the actual Researchers to shameful levels of job insecurity and precarious employment.

This contradiction is doing huge damage to the attractiveness and reputation of the career of Researcher and, it is, quite frankly, shameful in this 21st century.

Academic Freedom:

The fact that the right to academic freedom is enshrined in Irish legislation (The Universities Act 1997) has long been a source of great pride.

However, the fact that academic freedom is barely mentioned at all (and certainly not in any consequential way) in this Bill is worrying.

The kind of centralised micro-management of higher education, which is indicated as desirable throughout this Bill as currently worded, prompts us to paraphrase Albert Einstein's famous quote:

"If you insist on measuring [and controlling] everything that is valuable, you will end up valuing only those things that are measurable [and controllable]".

Finally, may I express our sincere thanks to the committee for giving us this opportunity to have an input into your deliberations.

I wish you great success in your important work.