



Higher Education Colleges Association

Presentation to the

**Oireachtas Joint Committee Education, Further and
Higher Education, Research, Innovation, & Science**

On

The Future Funding of Higher Education

February 2022

HECA thanks the Committee for inviting us here today to contribute to the Future Funding debate.

Funds Follow the Student - Funding for Students, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Future funding models must change to include all students public and private and must promote accessibility and progression.

HECA are proposing several ways in which funds should follow the student.

- This Committee should reiterate its predecessor Committee' recommendations (2017),¹ that student supports be extended to private HEI students. This should include SUSI, Disability, Student Assistant Fund, Gaeltacht, mental health and wellbeing, digital and the DARE and HEAR supports and extended to part-time and blended programmes.
- Ring fenced quotas for DEIS students in high demand programmes should be introduced to guarantee them minimum numbers of positions.
- Resources should be targeted at increasing learner participation from disadvantaged areas in all third level pathways. If places are restricted by constrained public funding the cost economies of private HEIs should be availed of to provide greater numbers of places per euro. Published data show private sector average costs of €6,500 yielding savings of €2,500 to €3,500² per student p.a. There are also savings in capital investment and pension costs.

Life-long Learning, Progression Pathways and Continuous Professional Development to Support Staff

Skills

The resources of private higher education should also be harnessed to address the increasing demographic and national skills challenges, widening participation and lifelong learning. Some governments actively utilise the private HEIs to address national demands, e.g., Poland, Hungary and Japan. Springboard has already presented the successful precedent of providing thousands of students from all sections of society with QQI validated qualifications in key skills areas to underpin Ireland's economic development. HECA providers have the physical and teaching capacity to ramp up provision to 57,000 places on QQI validated programmes.

Given the skills shortage imperative, obstacles blocking the inclusion of private HEI representation at the National Skills Council and Regional Skills Fora should be removed.

Random selection

The obscenity of random selection should be eliminated. This could be done by increasing places available to meet the demand for high points courses at the margin where restriction by random selection is necessitated. Alternatively, the randomly excluded students should be fully funded to study abroad. In the long term, alternative private and public pathways should be funded.

Alternative Pathways

Progression options other than the Leaving Certificate can be

- apprenticeships and traineeships,

¹ *Oireachtas Joint Committee of Education & Skills. Report on eligibility of students of maintenance grants to students-Wake Up SUSI 2017*

² <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-09-08/858/>

- foundation courses, community FE and HE colleges public and private,
- part-time, blended and online methods of qualifications,
- coherent stacking of microcredentials for academic pathways.

CPD

National Forum for Teaching and Learning funding for CPD to support staff should be inclusive of both public and private HEIs.

Future Expansion of Craft Apprenticeships and New Generation Apprenticeships

Funding for apprenticeships will provide a genuine opportunity to widen participation³, by enabling apprentices to embark on professional careers previously accessed only through professional exams or academic HE programmes.

We need to change people's attitudes to apprenticeships. Funding a promotional campaign would help highlighting the career achievements of top-level people who started life as apprentices such as Ralf Brandstaetter CEO Volkswagen Passenger Cars, and Professor Peter Drucker.

Research, Innovation and Engagement

The private HEIs need to deepen their research involvement and hence not excluded in research tenders.

Loans

The State should support a Not-for-Profit low interest student loan system to support students attending HEIs. Families and students increasingly rely on expensive commercial loans to attend HE. A not-for-profit Student Loan Company providing privately secured low-cost loans repayable when income thresholds have been achieved should be established for this purpose and state supported.

A European Fund for Strategic Investment skills & education aims to offer various financing options through financial intermediaries to be made available to students who meet the its criteria⁴. Should this proposal find favour with the Committee we would be happy to develop it further.

Funding Protection of Enrolled Learners

Academic bonding arrangements ensure that, in the event of discontinuance of their course, students are facilitated to continue to final qualification with another college. HECA is concerned that your predecessor Committee was informed that "academic bonding has not been achievable by providers⁵" at a time when the HECA academic bonding scheme had been in operation in its 3rd academic year. The HECA Scheme contained a framework agreement committing HECA colleges to such course continuance, a trust deed holding funds (now totalling €4,000,000) to cover the cost of this and contingent action plans for student transfer, all overseen by an oversight committee chaired by an eminent independent past president of a HEI. HECA believes that, subject to the continuance of the HECA Scheme, amendments should now be made to the 2019 Act providing for exemption from its learner protection, in common with many exempt HEIs.

Cathaoirleach agus Baill an Choiste, go raibh mile maith agaibh.

Professor Diarmuid Hegarty on behalf of the HECA

³ [Apprenticeships. \(Jackson & Magner\) Bringing College to the Workplace. The DBS Review.\(2018\)](#)

⁴ Annette [Investing in the Future](#) [Ingentaconnect.com](#) (2021)

⁵ [QQI Legislation Submission to Joint Committee Education & Skills](#) page 19, Subheading Limitations of the current legislative arrangements, second line (2018)