



**Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher
Education, Research, Innovation and Science
June 21st 2023
Session 2**

- Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Chair, thank for the invitation here today.
- The issues we are due to discuss are not only on the top of mind of the Committee but also areas of focus in my Department.
- I'm very glad to have the opportunity to provide updates on these areas of focus.
- If I can start with the news of the day and that is the publication of the HEA's Expression of Interest process.

- And I really want to thank Dr Alan Wall and Tim Conlon of the HEA, as well as my own colleagues Fiona O’Byrne and Niamh Devine for their leadership on this.
- Every year, we have an annual conversation with institutions asking them what they can do more and what can they do now.
- This allows us to plan forward. We now have a menu of options for increase in the number of doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and vets.
- This means that when demand arises – we can proceed with these places and this investment.
- It is clear there is a need for additional healthcare staff and as a Department, we have serious concerns about the volume of students travelling abroad to access veterinary education abroad.
- But today is just the start of the process. We will work with colleagues across Government to advance this work.

- And in September, we will commence a new process in the areas of therapies.
- This will look at what we can deliver in occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and other key areas.
- This is really important work and I am really pleased to be working with Minister Rabbitte and Minister O’Gorman on this area.
- Colleagues, this is the value of my Department. We can end the cycle of workforce planning on an annual basis and provide a sustainable pathway forward.
- Sustainable for the institutions and to the benefit of the public service.
- We are meeting nearly three years since the establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.
- In that time for learners and prospective earners we have reduced the cost of education and have Government

agreement on a sustainable funding landscape for the tertiary sector.

- For the first time in the history of the State we have also committed funding to the building of student accommodation.
- Tomorrow, I will make an announcement on the construction of student accommodation provision for the TU sector.
- There are now more pathways to learning than at any time in the past and better access to supports for those accessing that learning.
- Next week, we will open the new programmes for applications.
- For employers- there is a more cohesive skills architecture and greater engagement.

- There has been expansion of critical skills programmes to address workforce shortages across, green & digital skills, apprenticeship and healthcare.
- The publication and implementation of Impact 2030 puts research and innovation at the heart of addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges.
- I can confirm I have brought the National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers to Government yesterday and intend to publish the report later this week, or early next week.
- This is a first report from the two Independent chairs with very clear recommendations.
- These will now need to be considered and progressed.
- Any budgetary implications of recommendations will be considered within the usual budgetary processes.
- As we speak of the Budget, I hope colleagues will know I continue to focus on reducing the cost of third level education.

- Last month, we met with stakeholders from all across third level – staff, students, access offices – to hear their concerns about the cost of third level and to focus on their priorities.
- Next month, I will bring a Cost of Education paper to Government which will set out the various options for us to consider ahead of the Budget.
- I have made no secret, I wish to focus on access to supports for part-time students, with a particular focus on lone parents.
- We cannot ask lone parents – who are usually female but not always – to pack up and head to university for four years.
- But they are just as entitled to supports.
- Chairman, I will conclude by thanking you for the opportunity to address you here.
- I know we have much more to do but I am proud of all we have achieved
- I must also particularly thank this Committee for the pivotal role they have played in these achievements.
- The Higher Education Authority Act and the Research and Innovation Bill have been significantly improved by the scrutiny of this Committee.

- I believe the Pre Legislative Scrutiny Report on the Research and Innovation Bill is due to be published shortly. I must thank in advance, the members of the Committee and the Committee staff for their work on this report.
- My aim, and that of my Department, in all of this work, is to ensure that education becomes entwined in the fabric of Irish lives, an option to pursue at any age and through flexible channels that work at any stage in life.
- It is about providing the structure so that everyone in our country has the ability to live up to their full potential and in doing so, sees our society prosper and our economy equipped with the right skills to grow.
- We have made great strides towards these aims and there is of course still much work to do.
- I look forward in discussing these matters in greater detail.

ENDS