

Opening Statement
Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation
and Science, Simon Harris TD
Select Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science, 12 November 2020

Vote 45 – Further Revised Estimate 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chair, members of the Committee,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee as part of its consideration of the Further Revised Estimate for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for 2020.

I propose to give a brief initial overview of the Estimate and I will be happy to address any questions that members may have.

Composition of the Estimate

This Further Revised Estimate currently before the Committee includes two main components.

First, funding which was previously allocated to then-Department of Education and Skills. This comprises two expenditure programmes that transferred from Vote 26, namely those for Skills Development and Higher Education. The Dáil previously voted on these elements of the Estimate on 16 July of this year. On 21 October, the relevant functions were transferred from the Department of Education to my Department.

Second, additional funding has been included in this Estimate to meet the Covid related expenditure incurred by the Department, which was approved by Government and announced earlier in the year, as well as certain other expenditure.

Further transfers of functions

I should say that there will be further transfers of functions into my Department which will result in increased funding being allocated. Primarily, this will arise from the transfer of functions relating to research transferring into my Department from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The work to underpin these transfers is well advanced. I expect that, in terms of funding, this will be reflected in the Revised Estimates for 2021.

Key features of the Vote

The Further Revised Estimate for Vote 45 that is now before the Committee provides for a net allocation of €2.402 Billion. This represents a gross allocation of €2.506 Billion reduced by Appropriations-in-Aid of some €103 Million.

This allocation comprises the following elements:

- The original gross allocation of funding transferred from Vote 26 of €2.332 Billion to meet the various requirements of the Department in the areas of skills development and higher education. This includes a capital allocation of €177 Million.
- An additional €150 million allocated to provide for Covid related expenditure, which approved by Government and announced earlier in the year is now reflected in the Estimate. This funding provides for support for institutions, students and researchers.
- An additional €23 million for 2020 was allocated to the Department at Budget time and is reflected in the Estimate. This will support an additional capital grant of €15 million to higher education institutions and €8 million to support an initiative managed by SOLAS to mitigate educational disadvantage in the FET sector.

- At Budget time, I also announced a once-off **€50 million fund** to support students in the context of Covid. I will be bringing proposals to Government and making an announcement on this initiative very shortly, and it would be the intention that any additional funding required for this initiative will be dealt with through the Supplementary Estimates process.
- The current Estimate also includes a further €1 million to cover costs related to setting up the new Department and the provide for the costs of the Christmas bonus announced in Budget 2020 on training allowances costs that are aligned with social welfare rates.

My Department also has responsibility for the National Training Fund, which is non-Voted. The allocation for the NTF in 2020 is €723 Million.

Programme funding

The Estimate is allocated across two programmes.

The Skills Development programme has an allocation of some €607 Million which is primarily used to fund the activities of SOLAS, including administration costs, general expenses and Exchequer-funded activities in the area of further education and training. A capital allocation of €17.5 Million is included. Funding in this programme is also provided for Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The Higher Education programme has been allocated €1.899 Billion. This includes recurrent grant funding provided through the Higher Education Authority to universities, institutes of technology and other designated institutions. Separate funding is allocated for other institutions, including the Dublin Dental Hospital.

Another significant component of this programme is the funding provided for student support. There is also an allocation to meet superannuation costs of former staff of universities and institutes of technology.

The capital component of the higher education programme amounts to €174 Million and includes an allocation of €84 Million for third level infrastructure, €42 Million for research activities together with allocations for public private partnerships and shared services.

Technical Adjustment

In closing, there is a small technical adjustment required in this programme which I would ask the Committee to note. In the figures as originally presented, an amount of €131 million was allocated to subhead B3, which is the subhead for the general expenses of the HEA. This should in fact be allocated to subhead B4, which is the general current grants to higher education institutions.

This adjustment is technical in nature and does not impact on the overall Voted funds.

I thank the committee again for their consideration of this Estimate, and I would happy to engage on any issues which members wish to raise.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

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