



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

Opening Remarks

31 January Select Committee DFHERIS Revised Estimates 2024

Opening Statement by the Minister of State for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Select Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 31st January: Vote 45 – Revised Estimate 2024.

Chair, members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening to present the 2024 Revised Estimates for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. My officials have provided a briefing on our Estimate to the secretariat of the committee which hopefully will be of assistance to members.

The Estimate I am presenting to the committee today provides for a gross allocation of €4.26 billion for use this year by my Department. The allocation is broken down as €3.6 billion in current funding and €653 million in capital funding, which represents an increase of 4.2% on our allocation of €4.09 billion per the 2023 Revised Estimates. This makes our Department the 6th largest revenue budget and the 5th largest capital budget across Government Departments in 2024.

Our Revised Estimate includes a number of temporary allocations funded through;

- The Ukraine Contingency Fund,
- The National Recovery and Resilience Plan and
- The European Regional Development Fund.

When temporary allocations are excluded, the Department's core allocation for 2024 is €4.18 billion which represents an increase of €275 million (7%) on our core allocation for 2023 as published in the 2023 Revised Estimates.

The increased funding being provided in the Estimates will allow our Department to continue its investment in innovation, creativity and inclusivity and ensure that we, along with our agencies, can respond to the key economic and societal challenges our country is facing.

As I am sure all members would agree, it is vital that we continue to invest in our people and ensure that we put in place the structures needed to enable them to realise their full potential.

As such, I am pleased to note that our revised estimates sees an increase in core funding to the higher education sector of 9%. Specifically, this Estimate is providing over €160 million in current and capital funding to this sector to fund a number of major priorities including;

- €64.4 million to address the sustainable funding of Higher Education as set out in Funding the Future. This will bring the total committed core funding as part of Funding the Future to over €100 million in just two budgets. This will improve student staff ratios and strengthen capacity in the sector in addition to enhancing support services for students with greater alignment of provision to priority skills needs and the further development of tertiary programmes. It also includes €5.2m to continue to move the funding of existing medicine places to a sustainable basis.

- €3 million will provide further increases in medicine places in higher education for Irish and EU students, co-funded by my Department and the Department of Health. Building on the investment in 2023, this additional funding has seen 120 additional students commence medicine in September 2023 over the 2021 baseline, and will increase opportunities for students to progress to study medicine in Ireland and build on our talent pipeline.
- In recognition of the current cost of living struggles students face, we have invested €31 million to make a number of improvements to the student grant scheme. These changes include increases to student maintenance grants effective from January and a full restoration of maintenance grants for post graduate students. Importantly, for the first time ever, fees for undergraduate part time studies will now also be fully funded, thus benefitting eligible one parent families, students with disabilities and carers on low incomes as part of a brand-new pilot programme.

As the Committee will recognise, the further and higher education sector is a very sizeable sector with over 400,000 people engaged in learning across this landscape. Our Department plays a central role in responding to the skills shortages the economy is facing and, in order to remain competitive, we must continue to invest in our people and our talent and provide opportunities for all in a way that works for each of us. Revised Estimates 2024 sees an investment of €1.5 billion in Skills, reflecting an additional investment of €116 million in core funding. This investment includes;

- An additional €67 million for the Apprenticeship system to grow craft apprenticeship from 13,000 places in 2022 to over 16,000 places in 2024. This will also reduce the time that apprentices wait for training and provide bursaries to increase access to apprenticeships for under-represented groups.
- This Budget recognises that having the right training, education and skills is key to reaching our climate targets. My Department is supporting a range of initiatives to enable us to meet the challenges and skills needed for the green transition including investing in training programmes needed in the areas of Net Zero Energy Buildings and Retrofit, e-mobility capability and offshore wind.
- My Department is investing over €10 million in Skillnet Ireland under Ireland's ESF Programme, Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (known as EIST). Through this investment, Skillnet Ireland's networks will play a significant role in addressing skills shortages and the future world of work through expanded provision of upskilling and reskilling opportunities.
- As we plan for the future and the accelerated pace of change, we must make sure that this budget helps to support a future for everyone by breaking down barriers to education. From September 2024, PLC fees will be removed to ensure learners across the country do not face charges when pursuing a PLC course. This builds on our decision to eliminate the €200 PLC Levy in 2022.
- We are providing an additional €2m to expand the Fund for Students with Disabilities and a further €1m to implement the whole-of-government Adult Literacy for Life Strategy, which has the ambitious

goal of halving the share of adults in Ireland with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital skills needs by 2030.

I trust that this overview is of assistance to the Committee. I am happy to take to take your questions and I commend the Revised Estimate to the Committee.

Thank you.