

Addendum

To Ministers Responsible for Higher Education and Further Education.

Dear Minister,

The British and Irish Group of Teachers' Unions (BIGTU) is an association of all ten of the trade unions which represent teaching and other grades of staff in education institutions in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

BIGTU has written to the various Ministers of Education in each of the above jurisdictions setting out the concerns of members with regard to departmental/political responses to the current COVID 19 crisis. However, since we recognise that it is common that there are separate departments tasked with dealing with Higher Education and Further Education in some countries we are setting out our concerns in this addendum to the main BIGTU letter.

The unions which represent staff in HE & FE in the UK and Ireland are:

The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT), The Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) (Ireland), The Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), The National Education Union (NEU) and The University and Colleges Union (UCU) (United Kingdom).

While all of the above unions endorse fully the agenda of items of concern set out on behalf of BIGTU in its totality, we would ask that, in HE and FE, particular attention would be paid to the following issues:

- 1. Emergency funding for the sector:** the envisaged collapse of income from foreign students, accommodation services, summer schools, research councils and other non-exchequer sources will greatly exacerbate the financial crisis already facing the sector. BIGTU is committed to working with the universities, FE bodies, governments and all other stakeholders to find solutions to the current funding shortfall – through, for example, an emergency package for the sector – as part of efforts to ensure a long-term sustainable funding model for higher and further education in the various jurisdictions.
- 2. Workload, working conditions and resulting stress:** staff have been asked to take on a wide range of new work around online teaching, online exams and student support; staff are working under difficult conditions while balancing work-life commitments, often with poor communications and computer services.
- 3. Annual leave:** limit on carry-over should be lifted this year. We would also wish to discuss the impact of the changes which have already occurred on this year's annual leave entitlement.
- 4. Vulnerable position of casual and contract staff:** such staff provide vital services to the operation of the universities and colleges but now are faced with the potential loss of teaching hours, non-renewal of contracts and limited access to IT services. BIGTU Unions will oppose any redundancies or reduction of hours for precarious workers and insist on negotiations around any proposed changes to staffing levels. We expect all obligations in terms of **entitlements to permanent employment contracts** to be honoured in full.

5. **Performance reviews** (including student feedback on modules) to be optional and all staff assumed to be performing at expectation unless specific problems have been raised.

6. **Next academic year:** numerous challenges await in the new academic year, including delayed intake of first-year students and the impact on working practices. BIGTU seeks a united approach across all sectors, supported by all stakeholders, and will insist on negotiation around significant changes in established work practices associated with an abnormal academic cycle.

We would welcome your department's response to all of the above and we look forward to co-operating with you in finding fair and sustainable solutions to the problems besetting us collectively.

Yours sincerely
On Behalf of BIGTU HE & FE Unions