



UCD president lauds 'pioneering initiative'

UCD president Hugh Brady praised what he called the pioneering initiative signalled by Minister for Finance Brian Cowen in his Budget speech.

He welcomed Mr Cowen's "words from the mind and the heart" that it was Ireland's intellectual capital that was the single greatest contributor to its recent economic success. Dr Brady, who has pushed through a contentious programme of reform at UCD, said: "It is both inspiring and challenging to hear the Minister say that the Irish higher education system of today is the basis for the jobs of tomorrow."

"His words about the need for commitment to reform and the elimination of unnecessary duplication were characteristically direct, but I am confident there is nothing in them which will unnerve UCD or the sector as a whole."

The Irish Universities' Association, representing the seven university presidents, welcomed what it called a ground-breaking move on third-level funding. The universities, it said, would be well up to the challenges on reform set by the Minister.

Minister for Education Mary Hanafin said the package represented a major milestone in the development of the sector. "The Government recognises the central importance of higher education in delivering knowledge and providing the skills that will be essential to our competitive future. Investment in higher education is clearly seen by the Government as an important strategic investment in our national infrastructure. It is particularly significant that this will be reflected in the National Development Plan 2007 to 2013."

Chief executive of the Higher Education Authority Tom Boland said the new fund would be a significant help to universities and institutes of technology in delivering world-class higher education and research.

Dublin City University president Ferdinand Von Prondzynski said the Budget placed a welcome emphasis on the importance of third level and fourth level to the Government's strategy. "This is the first time that a Minister for

Finance has focused so strongly on higher education, and I regard it as a very positive development."

The Minister, he said, had taken on board the radical proposals made by the university heads in their submission to Government.

The council of directors of the institutes of technology also welcomed the new funding measures. The competitive and well-funded Strategic Investment Fund is a particularly welcome innovation, said chairman Tom Collins.

● Speaking after yesterday's Budget speech, Paddy Healy, president of the Teachers' Union of Ireland expressed concern about its failure to address key issues.

"The lack of mention of TUI's two key prioritised issues, the implementation of the McIver report on further education and an increase in the €2 million earmarked to tackle indiscipline, is hugely disappointing. Our future strategies on these issues will be discussed at a specially convened TUI executive committee meeting." This will take place later today.

The Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (Asti) general secretary John White welcomed the increased investment in childcare. However, he was disappointed that the Budget did nothing to address low levels of second-level funding, as compared to our European neighbours.

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