



Universities step up bid to end 'free fees'

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UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS

have stepped up their campaign for the return of student charges after new research shows "free fees" failed to widen access to higher education.

On his blog yesterday the president of DCU, Ferdinand von Prondzynski, said the "political commitment to maintain free fees is now much more about avoiding middle-class anger at the polls than about doing something progressive. It's a position that has to be brought to an end."

Dr Prondzynski was responding to a UCD report highlighted on his blog in recent days.

The study, by Dr Kevin Denny from the UCD Geary Institute, says the abolition of fees in the mid-1990s did little to widen access. It also says children of professionals score an average of 90 points more in the Leaving Cert exam than those from lower social classes. The paper documents how students from better off backgrounds do better in the Leaving.

Dr Prondzynski says the research underlines how free fees have ensured a near-100 per cent participation by the wealthy. "Middle income groups have benefited, but there are much more cost-effective ways of achieving the same result," he says.

In his paper, Dr Denny says the key factor is how students perform in the Leaving Cert exams: "the fact that the low-income kids do worse in the Leaving is why they are less likely to progress."