



*Administration*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2018), pp. 47–57  
doi: 10.2478/admin-2018-0006

## Education, 2017

**Orla O'Donnell**

*Institute of Public Administration, Ireland*

### **Budget 2018**

In his Budget 2018 speech the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe, TD, emphasised the importance of education, especially its vital role in keeping our economy competitive and attracting investment in a post-Brexit world. The minister announced education spending for 2018 of over €10 billion, 16.6 per cent of total expenditure. Budget 2018 aims to provide for almost 1,300 additional teaching posts; as a result, the pupil:teacher ratio at primary level will be reduced from 27:1 to 26:1. The minister acknowledged that the government is also committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs are given the opportunity to live independent lives and reach their full potential. The government is investing over €1.7 billion for special education needs in the coming year (Donohoe, 2017).

An estimated €46 million is being provided to meet demographic and demand-driven growth, the reduction in primary pupil:teacher ratio and enhanced career guidance counsellor provision. This reflects arguments outlined in a staff paper by the Irish Government Economic & Evaluation Service (IGEES) that, from 2017 to 2020, 'pure demographic cost pressure across the three sectors [health, social protection and education] is estimated to be between €428m to €440m annually'. The paper noted that the total demographic cost pressure will remain relatively stable to 2020. While demographic pressures in health and social protection will increase incrementally,

pressures in education will begin to ease due to the declining birth rate (IGEES, 2016).

Budget 2018 set out the multi-annual expenditure ceilings for the Education Vote Group for the period 2018–20, and these are presented in Table 1. The funding outlined will enable a significant level of services to be delivered in 2018 to realise the necessary improvements in the overall performance of the education and training system.

In response to the budget, the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) welcomed the announcement in the budget of additional teachers to tackle Ireland’s overcrowded classes in primary schools, as this was a key priority of the INTO’s pre-budget campaign. The INTO acknowledged that the announcement will see more than 300 additional primary teachers appointed to reduce class sizes in the most overcrowded schools, and a similar number to provide for increases in enrolment and the replacement of retiring teachers (INTO, 2017).

Commenting on Budget 2018, the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI) argued that there was little positive news in the budget for Ireland’s 350,000-plus second-level students, many of whom experience unacceptably large class sizes. The ASTI welcomed the additional guidance counselling posts but noted that these ‘merely represent another step towards the restoration of schools’ 2011 guidance counselling provision, which was cut in 2012’ (ASTI, 2017).

The Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) also criticised Budget 2018, stating that it does little to reverse the damaging effects of austerity cutbacks on the education system (TUI, 2017).

**Table 1: Education and Skills expenditure ceilings, 2018–20**

	2018 (€m)	2019 (€m)	2020 (€m)
Gross Voted Current Expenditure	9,339	9,388	9,446
Gross Voted Capital Expenditure	745	941	942
Total Gross Voted Expenditure (ministerial expenditure ceiling)	10,085	10,330	10,389

*Note:* Rounding affects totals.

The key features of Budget 2018 for education are as follows:

- €554 million funding increase for education in 2018.
- Over 2,200 extra posts (a mix of 1,091 special needs assistants and 1,280 new teaching posts and 10 new National Educational

Psychological Service psychologists) in schools will be provided in September 2018.

- A further €5.5 million will be allocated to provide support for a range of new policy measures, including implementation of the forthcoming foreign languages strategy, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education policy, digital learning strategy and the government's Creative Ireland initiative.
- Ensuring the well-being of students is a key priority of government. The equivalent of 100 additional guidance posts will be provided in September 2018. This will mean that 500 guidance posts will have been restored (out of 600 which were previously cut).
- Additional provision of €64.5 million to higher and further education and training in 2018, including €47.5 million from an increase in the National Training Fund (NTF) levy.
- 1,000 additional Springboard places.
- Over 6,000 new apprenticeships and 10 new apprenticeship schemes.
- A new performance and innovation fund that will support capacity-building in higher education institutions (HEIs) and reward institutions that exceed targets in key priority areas.
- Enhanced postgraduate funding and bursaries for disadvantaged students, and progress on technological universities and institutional mergers.
- In total, investment in higher and further education will be €100 million higher in 2018 than in 2016 (€53.5 million in increased Exchequer funding – including Budget 2017 carry-over measures and the additional €17 million in 2018 – and €47.5 million from an increase in the NTF levy).

### ***Reform of the NTF***

A range of reforms will be introduced in response to issues raised by employers as part of the consultation process on the Employer–Exchequer Investment Mechanism. This includes an independent review of the NTF to make it more transparent, as well as to better align the NTF with employer needs, including increasing ‘in employment’ programmes to €154 million in 2018 (from €106 million in 2017), significant additional and refocused funding on programmes relevant to employers, and a greater say for employers, more transparency and more evaluation.

### ***Curricular reform***

Budget 2018 makes provision to support the curricular reform programme, including the roll-out of Junior Cycle reform, with home economics, history, music, geography and mathematics reforms commencing in September 2018. €13 million of new and reallocated funding will be provided to deliver continued implementation of Junior Cycle reform.

### ***School leadership***

Budget 2018 will make €0.4 million available to fund additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools.

### ***Innovation***

Innovation in schools will be promoted through the development of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and digital clusters, which will encourage schools to work together and promote innovation.

### ***Lansdowne Road Agreement***

An additional €65 million will be provided in 2018 under the extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The gross cost of the Haddington Road Agreement, Lansdowne Road Agreement and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018–2020 in the education and training sector in 2018 will be €236 million.

### ***Capital***

Following the Review of the Capital Plan, additional capital funding of €663 million has been allocated to the education sector for the period 2018–21. €28 million of this will be available in 2018.

## **School retention rates report**

In November the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, TD, published a report on retention rates of pupils in second-level schools in Ireland. The report shows that Ireland's Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate school-completion rates are among the highest in Europe.

The main results of the report are as follows:

- 91.2 per cent of students who entered secondary education in 2010 sat their Leaving Certificate in either 2015 or 2016, compared to 90.2 per cent for the 2009 cohort;

- 97.4 per cent of students who entered in 2010 sat their Junior Certificate in either 2013 or 2014, compared to 96.7 per cent for the 2009 cohort;
- retention rates in DEIS schools have improved by 1.7 per cent – 84.4 per cent of those who entered DEIS schools in 2010 sat their leaving certificate, compared to 82.7 per cent of the 2009 cohort;
- improvements are even for both genders: the retention rate to Leaving Certificate increased by approximately 1 per cent for both – the male rate increased from 88.7 per cent to 89.7 per cent, and the female rate from 91.8 per cent to 92.7 per cent;
- voluntary secondary schools continue to have the highest retention rate to Leaving Certificate, at 92.7 per cent; community & comprehensive schools were next at 90.6 per cent, followed by vocational schools at 88.3 per cent.

The results show particularly significant improvements in retention rates in schools in the DEIS scheme. The gap in retention rates to Leaving Certificate between DEIS and non-DEIS schools continues to narrow, halving from 16.8 per cent for the 2001 cohort to 8.5 per cent for the 2010 cohort. The percentage of early leavers from education and training overall is at 6.3 per cent, which is down from 10.8 per cent in 2011 and is significantly lower than the EU-28 average of 10.7 per cent, improving Ireland's ranking in this measure to seventh in Europe. The percentage of 20–24-year-olds in Ireland whose highest level of education is at least upper secondary level education is the second best in Europe, at 94 per cent (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a).

### University rankings

In the *Times Higher Education (THE)* World University Rankings for 2017–18, Trinity College Dublin was ranked 117th, and was the only Irish university to feature within the top 200. In comparison, University College Dublin, the National University of Ireland, Galway, and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland were all ranked in the 201–250 bracket. University College Cork (UCC) was the only Irish university to be ranked in the 351–400 bracket. Dublin City University (DCU) remained in the same bracket as last year – 401–500. But Maynooth University moved from the 301–350 bracket to the 401–500 bracket. The University of Limerick and Dublin Institute of Technology remained in the same brackets as the previous year – 501–600 and 601–800, respectively (THE, 2017).

The *THE* rankings are the only global university performance rankings to judge world-class universities across all of their core missions – teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. The calculation of the rankings for 2017–18 was independently audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

### **New child protection procedures for schools**

In December Minister Bruton welcomed the full commencement of the Children First Act, 2015, and announced the publication of new child protection procedures for schools which take into account the new statutory mandated reporting and child safeguarding requirements.

The Act has placed elements of the *Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* report on a statutory footing, and provides for a number of key child protection measures that are relevant to schools, as follows:

- requirement on organisations providing services to children, which includes all schools, to keep children safe and to produce a child safeguarding statement;
- requirement on defined categories of persons (mandated persons), which includes registered teachers, to report child protection concerns over a defined threshold to Tusla – Child and Family Agency;
- requirement on mandated persons, which includes registered teachers, to assist Tusla in the assessment of a child protection risk, if requested to do so by Tusla.

### **STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026**

In November Minister Bruton launched the department's *STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026* and the *STEM Education Implementation Plan 2017–2019*. The plan outlines the minister's intention to make Ireland a European leader in STEM education by 2026. This policy statement focuses on the many strengths in STEM education in Ireland but also provides a roadmap to address the areas for future development.

Key ambitions include the following:

- increase by 20 per cent the total number of students taking chemistry, physics, technology and engineering for Leaving Certificate;
- increase by 40 per cent the number of females taking STEM subjects for Leaving Certificate;
- increase participation in out-of-school STEM learning opportunities and STEM career activities;
- introduce a new primary maths curriculum, which will include creative and computational thinking and coding;
- accelerate the introduction of computer science at Leaving Certificate, with implementation brought forward to September 2018;
- introduce new Junior Cycle mathematics and technology curricula;
- ensure teachers use a cross-disciplinary approach to incorporating STEM across all subjects;
- enhance STEM teaching, learning and assessment practices in early-years settings;
- close the gap in achievement in STEM disciplines between students in DEIS schools and students in all schools significantly;
- ensure that all schools, learners and parents have access to high-quality information on the diversity of STEM careers;
- build robust and sustainable partnerships between schools, business and industry, public sector bodies, research organisations, further and higher-level institutions, and the arts (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b).

Achieving these goals will require a significant increase in support to teachers and school leaders, and encouragement of innovation in teaching methods. Actions to deliver on these ambitions will be included in the department's annual programme under the *Action Plan for Education*.

### **Launch of OECD/European Commission report on Ireland's entrepreneurship education**

In October Minister of State Mary Mitchell O'Connor, TD, launched a new report by the OECD and the European Commission, entitled *Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Ireland*. This report outlines that entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education are critical for driving business start-ups, knowledge transfer, internationalisation, engagement with society and entrepre-

neurial mindsets in the labour force. The OECD and the European Commission conducted a comprehensive assessment of Irish HEIs, including a detailed survey of all university and institute of technology leaders, and extensive study visits by an international review panel. The report shows that HEIs play a fundamental role in fostering entrepreneurial career paths for their students and staff. Study visits to Galway–Mayo Institute of Technology, Limerick Institute of Technology, University of Limerick, UCC, DCU and Dundalk Institute of Technology revealed several very successful practices that stimulate and reward leadership at all levels, and create proper support structures and incentives for staff and students.

The report also identifies some areas for improvement:

- broadening the scope for multi- and transdisciplinary research initiatives in research priorities and in the effort to mobilise HEIs in regional and national development;
- a review of current employment control restrictions in higher education to allow for enhanced engagement activities with business and society;
- continued support for HEIs to establish collaborative and mentoring links with innovative and entrepreneurial HEIs abroad;
- a system-wide exercise to document and assess the impact of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education;
- enhance collaboration between policy structures and state agencies involved in supporting entrepreneurship and innovation in HEIs;
- enhance collaboration with small- and medium-sized enterprises through a single 'front door' approach;
- continue targeted state investment in internationalisation initiatives;
- introduce a system-wide exercise to document and assess the impact of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education;
- expand entrepreneurship education across all disciplines and increase the number of interdisciplinary education activities;
- increase the number of places available on venture creation programmes, particularly for students and alumni;
- incentivise and support staff engagement in knowledge exchange activities (OECD/EU, 2017).



**€6.3 million allocation to support technological university development**

In November Minister Mitchell O'Connor announced the allocation of €6.3 million in funding in support of the ongoing restructuring of the higher education landscape, including the development of consortia projects seeking to progress to designation as technological universities. In addition to the four technological university development consortia, the other landscape restructuring projects to which further funding has been allocated comprise the incorporation of DCU, St Patrick's College Drumcondra, the Mater Dei Institute and the Church of Ireland College of Education. This landscape project has created a 'New DCU' pluralist teacher education centre of international relevance and scale. Finally, there is the ongoing restructuring project which has seen the successful integration of Shannon College of Hotel Management with NUI Galway and the progression of an agreement between NUI Galway and St Angela's College Sligo, whereby these institutions aim to create an internationally recognised centre of excellence in teacher education on Ireland's western seaboard.

***Funding allocations by consortia, 2017–18***

The 2017–18 allocations are set out in Table 2. Expenditure will be subject to ongoing monitoring, review and formal approval by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

**Table 2: Higher education landscape funding allocations, 2017–18**

	<i>HEA to date</i> <i>(€m)</i>	<i>2017–18</i> <i>(€m)</i>
<i>Technological university consortia</i>		
Connacht Ulster Alliance	0.92	1.20
Munster Technological University	1.27	1.03
TU4Dublin	2.62	2.26
Technological University for the South-East	0.57	0.15
<i>Institutional mergers</i>		
DCU Incorporation	9.91	1.50
NUIG Incorporation	1.65	0.15
Total	16.94	6.29

Currently four consortia of institutes of technology are part of the process seeking to become designated as technological universities:

- Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA), consisting of Galway–Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology;
- Munster Technological University (MTU), consisting of Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tralee;
- TU4Dublin, consisting of Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Tallaght and Institute of Technology Blanchardstown;
- Technological University for the South-East (TUSE), consisting of Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow.

## References

- ASTI. (2017). *Budget 2018 does nothing for over-crowded classes at second-level* [press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.asti.ie/news/latest-news/news-article/article/budget-2018-does-nothing-for-over-crowded-classes-at-second-level-1/> [2 February 2018].
- Department of Education and Skills. (2017a). *Retention rates of pupils in second-level schools: 2010 entry cohort*. Retrieved from <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/retention-rates-of-pupils-in-second-level-schools-2010-entry-cohort.pdf> [2 February 2018].
- Department of Education and Skills. (2017b). *STEM education implementation plan 2017–2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/STEM-Education-Policy/stem-education-implementation-plan-2017-2019-.pdf> [2 February 2018].
- Donohoe, P. (2017). *Budget 2018 statement of the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform Mr Paschal Donohoe, TD, 10 October 2017*. Retrieved from [http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2018/Documents/Budget\\_2018\\_Financial\\_Statement.pdf](http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2018/Documents/Budget_2018_Financial_Statement.pdf) [2 February 2018].
- IGEES. (2016). *Staff Paper 2016: Budgetary impact of changing demographics 2017–2027*. Retrieved from <http://www.budget.gov.ie> [2 February 2018].
- INTO. (2017). *INTO: Additional teachers to reduce overcrowded classes welcome* [press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.into.ie/ROI/NewsEvents/PressReleases/PressReleases2017/Budget2018101017/Title,43466,en.php> [2 February 2018].
- OECD/EU. (2017). *Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education in Ireland*. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/supporting-entrepreneurship-and-innovation-in-higher-education-in-ireland\\_9789264270893-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/supporting-entrepreneurship-and-innovation-in-higher-education-in-ireland_9789264270893-en) [2 February 2018].

- THE. (2017). *World university rankings*. Retrieved from <https://www.times-highereducation.com> [2 February 2018].
- TUI. (2017). *Budget 2018 does not undo damage caused by cutbacks* [press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.tui.ie/news-events/budget-2018-does-not-undo-damage-caused-by-cutbacks.11648.html> [2 February 2018].