



László Molnárfi <molnarfl@tcd.ie>

HEA Bill 2022 To Be Discussed in Seanad Tomorrow

László Molnárfi <molnarfl@tcd.ie>

5 July 2022 at 18:35

To: Gisèle Scanlon TCDGSU <president@tcdgsu.ie>



Dear reader,

I am writing to bring to your attention as a student in the higher-level institution Trinity College Dublin my grave concerns surrounding Minister Harris' new plan for the future of academia in Ireland. I am László Molnárfi, the Chairperson of Students4Change, and Gisèle Scanlon is the President of the Graduate Students' Union of Trinity, and we have been lobbying different Senators with regards to the HEA Bill 2022.

We believe the plan of the government for third-level education is abysmal. Firstly, there is no commitment to reducing the student fees. Secondly, the funding is less than half of what our universities need. Thirdly, the plan comes with strings attached through the HEA Bill 2022, which is essentially a government takeover to control academia. **This bill will be discussed tomorrow from 3pm to 7pm in the Seanad.** Students4Change and the GSU have added 23 amendments through lobbying Senators to this bill, which will be tabled at tomorrow's debate.

Not only does the plan not include a reduction in the student fees, the state is taking over academia. In the 144-page bill, the "Minister" is mentioned 373 times. He holds sway over universities' equality policy. The same cabinet that is gifting away the National Maternity Hospitalin to the church will now hold this power. He and the Board that he appoints and the CEO of the HEA approves the budget and development framework of universities, unilaterally sets policies, guidelines and codes, and can impose serious penalties, for which no independent appeals board exists. The same neoliberal government that has decimated funding for our universities will now be able to control its finances. He will handpick people on governing bodies of universities. The same academic voices who are now dissenting will be finally muzzled, as a bigger share of state-appointed, external members and university leaders on governing bodies take power. There will be a subsequent shrinking of internal staff representatives, trade union and student representatives.

Students4Change and the Graduate Students' Union of Trinity lodged an FOI request to Minister Harris' Office as we felt that there was not appropriate stakeholder consultation across our College. The agenda of his office and tone of Minister Harris we deem unacceptable upon inspecting the documents we received. "Comply or explain", the words written by Minister Harris in reply to the IUA in document n. 18 and 19 sums up his attitude to the autonomy of the higher education sector throughout this bill. The bill has numerous detractors. The [23 documents we received](#) include UCC and Maynooth calling the bill a "command and control" over universities, the IUA saying that aspects of the bill do not "accord with natural justice and will prove unworkable", and universities raising concerns that state control will lead to reduced EU funding.

As raised by University College Cork, the HEA Bill 2022 under EU rules might reduce the overall capacity of the state to borrow, resulting in a weaker financial position for universities, if Eurostat assesses the proposed restrictions amounts to government control.

It is a crisis that the government themselves have created, and are now stepping in as saviours to fix it. They will not. They will further push their disastrous economic policy of corporatization down our throats.

Students and staff on the ground will be the most affected. The government promised no student loan system, but they cannot be trusted. They are playing the long game. Now that they will control academia, their policies cannot be stopped. We will be pushed to precarity.

In line with government policy, there is not a single mention of mental health funding within the plan. Who controls the money will control the policy. Small courses will be cut. Programmes will be merged. Academics will lose their jobs.

I would, therefore, like to ask you to support the [ongoing campaign](#) by Students4Change and the Graduate Students' Union of Trinity which demands to save the future of higher education in Ireland. **Please see our detailed briefing on the issue [here](#).** There is a lot of opposition to this bill coming from across the sector, but we need to put this into the national discourse. I implore you to spread awareness of this issue wherever you can, because it is nothing more than a government takeover of academia, a centralising of power in the hands of the HEA nationally, and a centralising of power in the hands of bureaucracy within universities as governing bodies will be shrunk and trade union, staff and student representation reduced.

In addition to our briefing document, please find more resources below.

[Shorter 7-point briefing document re. HEA Bill 2022](#)
[Universities Act 1997 vs HEA Bill 2022 Governing Body Composition](#)
[Powers of the Minister HEA Bill 2022](#)
[Powers of the Minister HEA Bill 2022 \(diagram\)](#)
[Myth vs Truth - HEA Bill 2022 \(debunking misconceptions\)](#)
[Students' Union Autonomy and the HEA Bill 2022](#)
[Explanatory video - why is the HEA Bill 2022 problematic?](#)
[HEA Act 1971 vs HEA Bill 2022 HEA Board composition](#)

I would like to ask you to support the abolition of student fees, adequate funding for higher-education and protection of our universities' autonomy. We need to stand up and make our voices heard and warn people of the impending catastrophe that will affect third-level education in Ireland for decades to come should this bill pass.

In solidarity,

László Molnárfi

Students 4 Change

Chairperson



is an alliance of Marxist and Anarchist students from Trinity College Dublin focused on the housing crisis in relation to student accommodation, Irish neutrality, SU reform and other matters of student politics. Go on our website students4change.eu, follow us on social media or email us at contact@students4change.eu!