



Students4Change issues statement on the passing of the HEA Bill 2022

22nd September 2022

The HEA Bill 2022 has passed the report stage of Seanad Éireann. Through the power of the collective, two crucial wins for students were won. These were an increase in the number of students on governing bodies from 2 to 3 and a guarantee that student union representatives will sit on them. Both of these are victories. The government saw the threat that the student vote poses to their rule and acted to save themselves.

However, other issues still remain, and we are deeply disappointed with the way the bill has transpired.

Unfortunately, the bill overall follows a rigid corporate philosophy in which the proportion of those who would advocate and ruffle feathers - students, staff and trade unions - will be shrunk in favour of those who toe the line on governing bodies - external, ministerial and senior management. The changes follow the logic of public management 'reforms' in other jurisdictions, which seek merely to increase the power of senior management and of the politico-economic elite.

For example, there is no guarantee for trade union and local authority representation throughout the bill. Furthermore, when it comes to universities, there is no guarantee that staff will sit on the governing bodies at all. Finally, the bill gives the government excessive and unnecessary powers to interfere in our institutions, including in equality, finances and academic practices. Out of 326 Seanad amendments, 1 was accepted by Minister Simon Harris.

The bill is a power grab by bureaucracy within institutions, and by the state over institutions, meaning that it will worsen the problems of rising fees, sky-high university accommodation rent, cutting of vital services like welfare, mental health supports and the casualization of the academic workforce.

It is a disaster for third-level education, and we must continue the fight in our institutions, for example by lobbying higher-education institutions to include trade unions on governing bodies despite it not being mandated by law. Thank you to all who engaged with students on the bill, including student unions, the press and all the Senators and their assistants.