



University College Dublin
An Coláiste Ollscoile,
Baile Átha Cliath

Opening Statement

Funding for Third-Level Institutions

Mike Beary
Chair, UCD Governing Authority
Oireachtas Joint Committee
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Mike Beary, Chair, UCD Governing Authority

Cathaoirleach, members of the committee, thank you for the invitation.

In 2022, the Government acknowledged what our sector had experienced for over a decade: an annual higher education funding deficit of €307 million. While recent Budgets have gone some way to addressing this, in today's terms the gap remains €250 million and universities continue to operate under severe structural strain.

Yet, despite this shortfall, UCD has consistently delivered.

Where Government has invested, UCD has used that support, and money we raised independently, to grow. We now have almost 36,000 students in Dublin. UCD is ranked among the top 1% of universities globally, having climbed 93 places in the QS world rankings over the last seven years to reach the top 100. We're also Ireland's leading university for Horizon Europe funding. A €350 million European Investment Bank facility, the bank's largest loan to an Irish university, anchors a capital programme approaching €1 billion. Our impact is broad: three of the four authors honoured in a new set of stamps from An Post celebrating Ireland's rich literary tradition are UCD alumni. Nearly one in four of Team Ireland at the Paris Olympics were UCD students or graduates.

We have used every ounce of university ingenuity to do more with less, stretching our staff and resources to power Ireland's talent-driven economy.

However, we are now at the absolute limit of capacity – resourcefulness can't substitute for a properly funded system.

The fair question back to us is: what would you do with more? Three things. More faculty, bringing 19 students per academic closer to the OECD's 15, so students get more teaching and the country gets more expertise. Graduates ready for a world shaped by AI, by pressure on democratic institutions and by a sharper contest for economic sovereignty, with AI, leadership, innovation and sustainability built into every degree. And time to turn research into innovation that serves society and helps Irish-owned firms grow. We'll back student founders with the support and maker spaces to lead the next phase of Ireland's growth. That is investment in our national and economic resilience.

Ireland faces surging demographic growth, rapid economic change, and an urgent need for indigenous, knowledge-driven enterprise. UCD has the vision, set out in our *Breaking Boundaries* strategy, to meet these demands. We want to be a full partner in Ireland's future. But we cannot deliver a world-class economy and society with one hand tied behind our back.

Settle the funding question, and we'll turn public investment into talent, into discovery, and into capable and confident citizens.



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