



**Cónaidhm Éireannach na Múinteoirí Ollscoile
Irish Federation of University Teachers**

PRESS RELEASE

31 OCTOBER 2009

**Universities threatened by market-based
funding, warn international experts**

Universities are being subjected to the same market-based, profit-driven policies that caused the crisis in the financial markets and face an increasing risk of a crisis in academic standards and credibility, David Robinson, Associate Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), stated at a conference organised by the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) in Dublin today (Saturday, 31 October).

Mr Robinson warned that the drift in western countries towards commercialised universities and dubious quality providers must be resisted if universities are to preserve their function as reservoirs of research and innovation.

“Medical researchers, for instance, have warned that the focus on market outcomes has encouraged a misguided emphasis on research that produces minor modifications to existing care, rather than fundamental explorations of illness.

“Increased research collaboration with industry, actively encouraged by governments, is increasing restrictions on academics and even causing prominent scandals. In the University of Toronto, a clinician, who sought to inform participants in her research at the Hospital for Sick Children that a new drug could pose health risks, had her funding withdrawn by the sponsoring company and legal action was initiated to prevent her highlighting the issue.

“In Britain, the government recently announced ST£106 million of research funding towards areas of ‘predicted economic potential’ while the Universities Secretary stated that ‘universities need to focus more on supporting the economy’. This approach, dressed up as a ‘value-for-money’ policy, ignores the fact that the world’s most important scientific discoveries typically have come from basic research,” David Robinson said.

Danish speaker, Jens Vraa-Jensen, of Education International (EI), warned that universities cannot be managed according to market principles and at the same time fulfil their basic mission.

“The basic *raison d’être* for any private enterprise is to create profit for its owners. The purpose of a university is not profit, but to spend money in the most appropriate way on teaching students and conducting research to develop the intellectual capacity of future generations and provide the society with new knowledge for future development and welfare.

“Teaching in a competitive market situation will be reduced to the fastest way of providing students with only the absolute necessary skills to get them employed after graduation. Intellectual development, which takes time in many cases, will be the first victim,” he said.

Mike Jennings, General Secretary of IFUT, said that some Irish private third-level colleges are claiming it is ‘unfair’ that they do not receive state funding, while a number of universities here now require evidence of ability to fundraise when appointing senior academics.

“Irish universities must not become the pawns of market forces and private speculators, who view education as just another source of profit and their students like customers in a supermarket,” Mr Jennings said.

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