

Defend the Irish University Campaign—A call for Solidarity

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University professors in Ireland are leading a campaign that links concerns for their work with a concern for education as a public good. Ronnie Munck of Dublin City University, the center of the campaign, wrote to me recently: “In the wake of the Celtic Tiger collapse the Irish university system has suffered a concerted attack by neoliberal managers who wish to expunge its public good purpose. Irish academics are now driving a charter of basic principles that we think should characterise any university.” Munck explained that “we are moving into gear seeking to protect working conditions at the university from a concerted marketization drive that has seen pay drop by 25%, a freeze on all appointments and a deliberate increase of casualization as well as a steady increase in outsourcing or privatization of service.”

The campaign’s 10 leading principles, [which you can endorse here](#), are:

1. The Irish university is a public good, not a private profit-making institution, and corporations or business interests should not dictate teaching or research agendas.
2. The strategy of a university should reflect all dimensions of human endeavour and be built on the full and open participation of all staff and students.
3. The main aim of teaching is the dissemination of knowledge and the fostering of creativity, and is not just about increasing ‘human capital’.
4. The main aim of research is to create new knowledge. It is not just about enhancing the profit margins of corporations, many of which do not even meet their tax obligations in Ireland.
5. After teaching and research, the third mission of universities is about engaging communities and addressing social disadvantage, and not just about ‘enterprise engagement’.
6. Students are the lifeblood of the university, and the next generation of enlightened and humane citizens and are not just consumers of education

or generators of 'customer satisfaction' indices.

7. All staff working at universities are entitled to a dignified and collegial workplace free of surveillance and control and the arbitrary degradation of working conditions.
8. Information and communications technologies are a great tool for teaching and research but should not be used to impoverish the quality of education or reduce staff-student contact time.
9. University management should be dedicated to resisting public education cutbacks and not the multiplying of senior management posts, many of which are unnecessary.
10. In the current crisis of the Irish university system, we need to stress the importance of academic freedom over a fear-driven consensus, creativity over blind compliance and collegiality over managerialism.

Please sign this petition and publicize the principles. This campaign deserves our support because it links the value of the labor of academics in higher education to the value of education as a public good. For those of us who oppose putting the educators' brains under the administrators and university design specialists' caps, who oppose the corporatization of the university, these principles are a good starting point for putting our brains back in our own heads. The idea that those on the front lines of the university workplace should guide the public purpose of this workplace is part of these demands.

Luckily the Irish University campaign is supported by SIPTU (Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union), Ireland's largest union, which represents professors as well as other university employees. The Irish Federation of University Teachers has joined the campaign and denounced the "reckless endangerment" of university education by the education minister's draconian budget cuts. In the U.S. we are facing these same issues, in which market principles, students as consumers and knowledge workers as transferable parts in a machine have taken root.

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