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Public Affairs Ireland Weekly Newsletter

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Affect of third-level cuts can be seen in rankings

Since 2004, universities across the world have been ranked in the QS World University Rankings. This year's figures show that, while Ireland have two universities in the top 200, they both suffered a decrease in their ranking over last year.

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) remains the highest-ranked institution in Ireland, however, it dropped 20 places this year (from 78th to 98th). University College Dublin (UCD) is Ireland's second-best performer, but still dropped from 154th place to 176th place this year. Five of Ireland's other institutions also fell in the rankings, including: University College Cork (from 233rd to 283rd); DCU (from 353rd to 380th); and University of Limerick (falling out of the global top 500 to the 501-550 band). NUI Galway's position improved, bringing it into the top 250 (at 249th place).

Seven of the eight universities in Ireland also dropped in the faculty/student ratio category, and in the graduate employability category.

For the first time since the rankings began, all three of the top spots were occupied by US universities: Massachusetts Institute of Technology was first, Stanford was second and Harvard ranked third. Cambridge University came fourth in the rankings. However, on the whole the UK saw reductions on a par with those in Ireland.

The head of research at QS explained, "This year's rankings imply that levels of investment are determining who progresses and who regresses ... Institutions in countries that provide high levels of targeted funding, whether from endowments or from the public purse, are rising."

Lane recommends a budget that supports property market

Preceding every year's Budget, the Governor of the Central Bank sends a letter containing their recommendations to the Minister for Finance. This year, the Central Bank took the decision to publish the letter. They have confirmed that this will be the case in future.

This year's letter, penned by current Governor Phillip Lane has warned Minister of Finance Michael Noonan TD against making any budgetary decisions that could adversely affect the property market. Lane commented,

"Any fiscal measures in support of the government's housing strategy should be sufficiently targeted to avoid material aggravation of current distortions in the residential property sector."

This comes amid speculation that the Government could be planning to introduce measures to help those having difficulty getting on the property ladder. This is rumoured to include a tax-rebate scheme aimed at first-time buyers.

Lane has also called for the development of "separate national target" in addition to the EU ceiling on public debt. This is in the wake of the CSO's July revision of the GDP growth figure for 2015 to 26.3%.

Tax loophole to be closed

The Government have decided that they will be closing the loophole in tax legislation that has been exploited by vulture funds of late. The change is expected to come as part of Budget 2017 next month.

Despite vulture funds having spent billions acquiring bad loans, and amassing profits in the millions, some have only landed themselves with a Revenue bill of €250. This is done by use of s.110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The section includes the following clause:

“qualifying company” means a company resident in the State which carries on a business of the management of qualifying assets which it acquired from the original lender or original lenders or the originator or originators, as the case may be, and does not carry on any other business, apart from activities which are ancillary to the business of the management of those qualifying assets, but a company shall not be a qualifying company if any transaction is carried out by it otherwise than by means of a bargain made at arm’s length.

New measures to clamp down on the use of this section are now planned. The Revenue Commissioners has presented a report on the loophole, to the Department of Finance and budgetary measures will be developed using this. There is some doubt as to whether they will legally be able to apply this to vulture funds retrospectively.

In addition to this, the charities regulator will be conducting an investigation, as vulture funds often use charity trusts to lower their tax pay out.

It is expected that Minister Noonan will announce full details of an independent review into the Irish corporation tax system during the Budget 2017 announcement on 11 October. This review should be completed within the subsequent six months.

Dublin Bus strike to take place this week

Following a breakdown of Friday’s talks between management and trade union representatives, it looks as if the first of three 48-hour Dublin Bus work stoppages will take place at the end of this week (Thursday 8 and Friday 9 September). If no solution is met, two further stoppages will take place next Thursday 15 and Friday 16, and the following Friday 23 and Saturday 24 of September.

This industrial action is being taken by Dublin Bus workers as part of a dispute over pay. The workers rejected the Labour Court recommendation of an 8.2% pay increase over three years. They are seeking a 15% pay increase over three years, which would bring their salaries in line with that of Luas workers.

In June, Luas driver pay was increase by 18% over a four year period, following a long dispute between workers and management company Transdev.

Dublin Bus workers are also seeking payment of a 6% award that dates back to 2008.

It is expected that 400,000 commuters will suffer from the lack of service. Other modes of transport will also suffer, such as the Dart and the Luas. It is expected that traffic in Dublin City Centre will see much greater volumes of traffic. However, Dublin Bus have claimed that they simply do not have the funds to pay workers the figure they are seeking.

This week at Public Affairs Ireland

On the Blog

JS Presidential Election 2016: *Could the electoral process throw up a major surprise this year?*

Andy Cullen

Read [here](#)

Completing an application form for the Civil and Public Service

Tina Kinirons

Read [here](#)

New Corporate Governance Code for State Bodies

Tom Ferris

Read [here](#)

Trends and Developments in Freedom of Information: A Year in Review

Claire Hogan

Read [here](#)

Emotional Intelligence: Why it's even more important this year

Billy Byrne

Notes from the Editor

Please note that PAI's conference, "Brexit: Some implications for public policy and public administration in Ireland" has been rescheduled. It will now take place on Friday 21 October. We are pleased to announce that EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, will deliver the Keynote Address. Other speakers will include economist Jim Power and former union leader Blair Horan.

Issue 2 of *The Public Professional* is now available. Members can access it for free through our website. Non-members can buy print or digital versions on a copy-by-copy basis, or through a yearly subscription.

If you have any questions or comments, you can contact our editor, Shauna, at editor@pai.ie.

Upcoming Public Affairs Ireland Conferences



Policy Development and Legislation in a Changed Political Environment: How has a minority Government impacted on the legislative process?

Friday 30 September,
9am to 1pm,
in the PAI Building.

[Book here.](#)

Addressing the Housing Crisis

Thursday 06 October,
9am to 1pm
Westbury Hotel

[Book here.](#)

Brexit: implications for public policy and public administration in Ireland

Friday 21 October,
9.30am to 1pm,
The Alexander Hotel.

[Book here.](#)

This week in Dáil Éireann

Wednesday 07 September

10a.m.

Motion re: Appeal the European Commission's decision that Ireland provided unlawful State aid to Apple (Department of Finance) (to conclude at 8 p.m. if not previously concluded)

This week in Seanad Éireann

Adjourned until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 28 September 2016

This week's Committee Meetings

Tuesday 06 September

Budgetary Oversight

CR3, LH 2000 1 p.m.

AGENDA: Session A: 1 p.m. Private Session;

Session B: 2 p.m. Analysis of economic forecasts [Mr. Gabriel Fagan - Central Bank of Ireland]; and

Session C: 3:30 p.m. Economic and Fiscal Position [Dr. Tom Mc Donnell - Nevin Economic Research Institute(NERI)]

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Joint)

CR1, LH 2000 2 p.m.

AGENDA: Private Meeting

Tuesday 06 September

Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (Joint)

CR2, LH 2000 11 a.m.

AGENDA: Rising costs of Motor Insurance (resumed)

Session A: 11 a.m. [Mr. Conor Faughnan, Director of Consumer Affairs, AA Ireland; Mr. Kian Griffin, Underground Ireland; and Mr. Eamon Timmins, Chief Executive Officer, Age Action Ireland];

Session B: 2.30 p.m. [Mr. Dermott Jewell, Consumers' Association of Ireland]; and

Session C: 4 p.m. [Mr. Mark Fielding, ISME; Ms. Patricia Callan and Mr. AJ Noonan, SFA; and Mr. Neil Walker and Dr. Michael Gillen, IBEC]

European Union Affairs (Joint)

CR1, LH 2000 11.30 a.m.

AGENDA: The Priorities of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU [His Excellency, Mr. Dusan Matulay, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Ireland]

Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources (Joint)

CR4, LH 2000 12 noon

AGENDA: The Digital Single Market [Mr. Andrus Ansip, EU Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market]

Members' Interests of Seanad Éireann CR3, LH 2000 2 p.m.

AGENDA: Private Meeting

Wednesday 07 September

Social Protection (Joint)

CR3, LH 2000 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA: Priorities for the Department of Social Protection [Minister for Social Protection]

Education and Skills (Joint)

CR4, LH 2000 11 a.m.

AGENDA: (i) Scrutiny of EU legislative proposals:

Schedule A: COM(2016)382; COM(2016)383

Schedule B: COM(2016)1; COM(2016)61; COM(2016)78;

COM(2016)185; COM(2016)210; COM(2016)242 and;

(ii) Engagement with Mr. Pauric Travers, Chairperson Designate, Educational Research Centre (ERC)

Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (Joint)

CR2, LH 2000 11 a.m.

AGENDA: Session A: 11 a.m. - Election of the Vice-Chairperson

Session B: 2 p.m. - Rising Costs of Motor Insurance [Minister of State with special responsibility for Financial Services, eGovernment and Public Procurement]

Budgetary Oversight

CR3, LH 2000 2 p.m.

AGENDA: Economic and Fiscal Position [Mr. Alan Barrett and Mr. Kieran Mc Quinn - Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)]

Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht (Joint)

CR1, LH 2000 2.15 p.m.

AGENDA: (i) Culture 2025 - Éire Ildánach A Framework Policy to 2025 and related matters [Representatives from the Association of Artists' Representatives Organisation, the National Campaign for the Arts and Screen Producers Ireland] and;

(ii) Scrutiny of EU legislative proposals:

Schedule A: COM(2016)400

Schedule B: COM(2014)437