

Leaving Cert results 2008

O'Keefe: Fees may be needed to support less well-off

Minister says he raised issue to provoke a national debate

by Niall Murray
Education
Correspondent

EDUCATION Minister Batt O'Keefe believes it is fair to consider the possibility of high-earning families paying for their children to attend college in order to help the less well-off achieve the same.

The minister suggested he had raised the question regarding the reintroduction of third-level fees as part of a national debate on the funding of higher education.

"I expected, in the early days of the debate, to have the usual opposition cries with no forethought and no rational arguments in terms of what we should plan ahead for," Mr O'Keefe said as he congratulated students collecting their Leaving Certificate results at Ballincollig Community School near his own home.

The minister, who is beginning work on the country's first national strategy to determine how third-level education is delivered over the next 20 years, said funding has to be a feature of the considerations.

"I'm looking at a society now where there are no fees; a society where there are extremely high earners who are not contributing to students entering third level. I'm asking those people to play a part and I will be putting these sentiments to government," he said.

The minister has rejected claims from higher education chiefs, who he will meet next month, that the sector has been under-funded in recent years, insisting instead that funding has increased by 25% since 2005 to €2 billion.

He has, however, recently ordered all colleges to cut their pay bills by 3% this year, although the details of where the cuts are to be made have not yet emerged.

"The taxpayer is contributing €532 million by way of tuition fees to third level and it behoves me to look at exactly how we're going to move forward and fund it," Mr O'Keefe said.

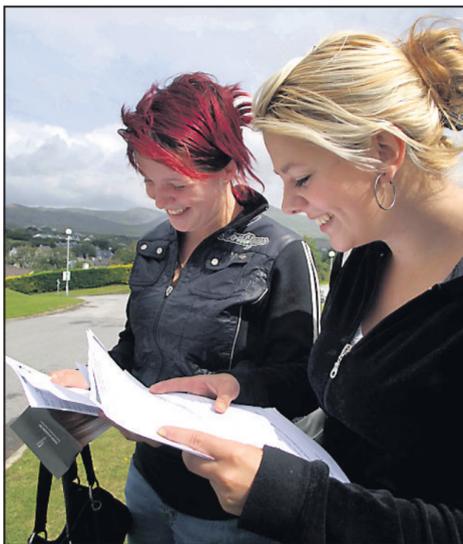
The minister went on to defend his decision to ask the Comptroller and Auditor General to examine the value the State receives for the higher education budget, which will likely include close scrutiny of some colleges, the time spent by academics on teaching, and whether funds targeted at disadvantaged students are being spent appropriately.

"There has been a major improvement in the number of people in third level from the less well-off sectors of society, but I'm obviously not satisfied with that. I see the introduction of some form of fees in the future as helping me ensure a greater support service is available in those communities," the minister said.

But the institute of technology sector described the fees debate started by Mr O'Keefe as a calculated distraction from the severe impact on students of spending cuts he has directed.

"They will have a negative impact on the range and number of programmes available and we're particularly concerned that they will have a disproportionate impact on undergraduate students, particularly the disadvantaged students who must be educated to the highest standards to drive change in our rapidly evolving open economy," said Institutes of Technology Ireland chairwoman Marion Coy.

She added that the group's dismay at the increase in student registration fees by €75 to €900 this year, claiming that 75% of the increase will be clawed back by the Department of Education.



Natalie Sugrue and Roisín Dillon, checking their Leaving Cert papers at Beara Community School, Castletownbere, Co Cork.
Picture: Denis Scannell



Andrea Bickerdike, Ashton School, Blackrock, Cork, who received 600 points in her Leaving Cert.
Picture: Neil Danton



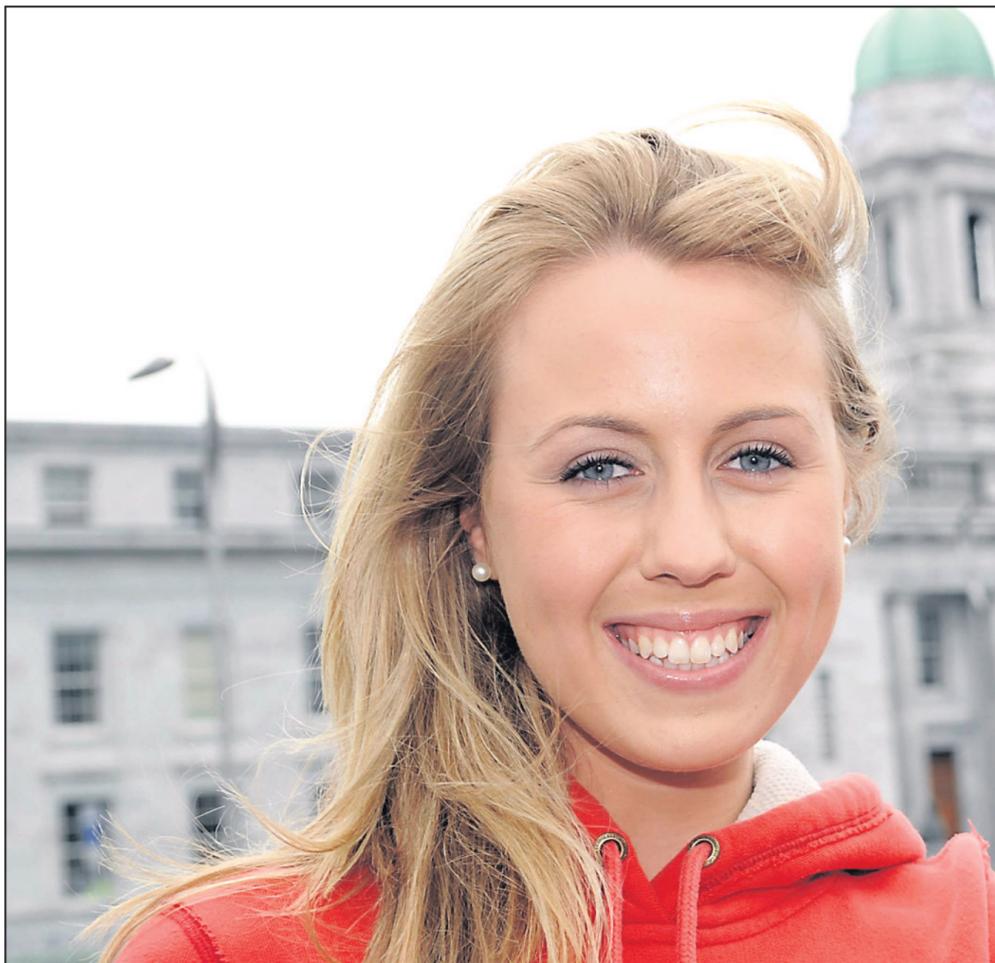
Kenneth Howick, Coláiste Christ Ri, shows off his 8 A1s in his Leaving Cert.
Picture: Neil Danton



Students from De La Salle, Macroom: John O'Connell and Mark Healy, who scored 600 points in the Leaving with Noel Dunne, principal, and Minister O'Keefe. Pic: O'Sullivan



Christian Brother College students Ian Chisholm, Mark Moriarty and Kevin O'Keefe celebrate achieving 8 A1 grades in their Leaving Certificate results, in Cork city yesterday.
Picture: Provision



Delighted with her eight A1s is Eabhann O'Connor, a pupil at St Aloysius, Carrigtwohill, Co Cork.
Picture: Dan Linehan



Conor Browne, Shane McCarthy and Diarmuid O'Mahony, celebrating their Leaving Cert results at Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine, Kenmare, Co Kerry.
Picture: Denis Scannell



Philip Bredin and Stephen Murphy, Presentation Brothers College, Cork, who received 7 A1s and 6 A1s respectively.
Picture: Neil Danton



Aoife Hill, Edel Cronin and Ciara Ennis pupils at St Aloysius, Carrigtwohill, Co Cork, after receiving their results.
Picture: Dan Linehan

Bishop accuses State of diluting role of Church in schools

by Mary Regan
Political Reporter

THE Government was accused of diluting the role of religion in education by what the Catholic bishops said was a "policy assumption" that all secondary schools should be multi-denominational.

Less than half of secondary school pupils are now educated in Church-run schools and a similar

situation is developing in primary schools, according to the chair of the Bishops' Commission on Education, Bishop Leo O'Reilly.

He criticised the treatment of the Church in the Government's new codes of practice on planning for schools which he said "relegate them to the past" and "consign their role in school ownership to history".

The Code of Practice on the Provision of Schools was

published earlier this month and only has one mention of the role of religious patrons who run schools.

Bishop O'Reilly is concerned leases for schools, agreed three years ago between the Department of Education and religious orders that run the schools, have still not been finalised.

The leases were agreed after the department adopted a policy of purchasing all school sites and then leasing

them back to the religious orders.

"The Department of Education in consultation with the patrons produced a draft lease agreement in 2004 and despite repeated approaches by patrons and management of schools since then a final lease has not been agreed and published," Bishop O'Reilly said in a speech to the Parnell summer school in Wicklow yesterday.

He said the Church bod-

ies which provide the education are not consulted about planning for providing schools. "The patron bodies are the educational providers on the ground. They have served the State well in the past and we believe continue to serve it well. As key partners in education they need to be consulted on the provision of new schools.

"There seems to be a policy assumption in the

Department of Education that every new school at second level should be multi-denominational."

Bishop O'Reilly also called on students who got their Leaving Cert results to consider a religious life.

"I have no doubt that God is calling young women and men of this generation to give their lives to spreading the Gospel and our society needs this service too," he said.

Secret of A1 success: Teachers, sport and music

by Jennifer Hough

A CORK student who received eight A1s in his Leaving Certificate attributed his success to 'phenomenal' teachers, and balancing study with sport, music and socialising.

Mark Moriarty, 18, from Rochestown, was one of three Christian Brother College students along with Ian Chisholm, and Kevin O'Keefe to be awarded eight A1s, out of only 13 around the country.

Mr Moriarty, who studied chemistry, applied maths and physics, said that he felt his results were mainly down to good teaching.

"Obviously I had to work

hard, but my science and maths teachers were really great and I have to thank them."

Mr Moriarty, who says his passion is physics, has represented Ireland in the 'Olympics of physics' over the past three years.

"I won a bronze medal this year. I have travelled to Singapore, Iran and this year Vietnam, representing Ireland.

"I love it and I am lucky because I know what I want to do, for some people it is blind guessing," said Mr Moriarty who is to study the subject at University College Cork.

Larry Jordan, principal at CBC said the co-operation between the students and the

teachers made such high grades possible.

"In a maths class of 30 this year there were 24 higher A1s. That tells its own story. Our maths teacher here, Ann Barry-Murphy has been achieving these results quietly and effectively for the past ten to 15 years.

"It is the most remarkable thing I have ever seen. Her teaching ethic is outstanding. She runs a very tight ship and treats all of her pupils the same. There are no exceptions and every student must have his work done all of the time. She teaches up until the last bell on the last day of term and all students must be present."