

...underpin the public finances and  
attack some key problems. That opportunity  
should not be let slip away.

## University rankings Too good to be true

On the face of it the performance of Irish universities in the most recent QS World University Rankings 2024 is welcome. Seven out of the eight universities improved their rankings, with Trinity College Dublin the standout performer, rising 17 places to 81st. But a deeper look paints a less rosy picture. Six out of the eight fell in terms of academic reputation and none of them are in the top 100 for research impact. To the uninitiated these two areas are the true measure of any third-level institution and it is hard to reconcile the performance of Irish universities in this regard with the notion of improvement.

The inherent contradiction owes much to unaddressed structural issues which can produce perverse outcomes in terms of ratings. Writing in this paper, two higher education consultants, Ellen Hazelkorn and Tom Boland, highlighted that the methodology employed by QS rewards universities with a lot of overseas students.

Irish universities are actively recruiting students from abroad – who pay higher fees – in order to bridge the gap between State funding and their costs. Among the unintended consequences is fewer places for local students. Paradoxically, the improved rankings will only increase the appeal of Irish universities to overseas students.

There are two lessons. The first is not to put too much store by the QS rankings, or indeed any of the approximately 16 alternative ranking tables.

The second is that the Minister for Further and Higher Education Simon Harris needs to be clearer on how he will close the third-level funding gap which was estimated in 2022 at €307 million a year on a standstill basis – not taking into account future demographic needs or new policy proposals. Closing this gap would only bring us into line with our international peers. Surely our ambition needs to be higher than that?

Harris promised last year that he will “prioritise closing this gap over a number of budgets”. The Government has indicated spending increases of over €5 billion for 2024. How much is allocated to university funding will tell its own tale.

...has to be allowed to respond appropriately.  
Bear in mind that none of the RTE witnesses had been involved in arranging the top-up payments.  
PAC member Verona Murphy, Ind, used her allocated time to hector Adrian Lynch aggressively to confirm whether he would resign if Ryan Tubridy sued for being taken off air. Mr Lynch attempted to respond, but was interrupted by Ms Murphy who said it was a binary question, yes or no.

As any lawyer present for Mr Lynch would have said: it isn't a yes or no question, it is a hypothetical question requiring the witness to speculate about several possible future outcomes; requiring comment on potential litigation was inappropriate; and the question was not relevant to the question of the top-up payments made to Mr Tubridy. The chairman did not intervene.

Ms Murphy argued that Mr Lynch's action was likely to cost the taxpayer a fortune. In so doing, she conveniently forgot

back 20 years grant that o readily.  
He also RTE chair ghallagh fr details of a involving D lier news p ly, she had details.  
Most of t haved booi PAC reformi vised pro clude a le; person, an ed questi and an er and speec The me go detaile dures for and the ru courtesies There mus tect wites nation.

No less been learr case. – You JOHN M Dundru Dublin 1

## RTE – the players and the pay

Sir, – Golden handshakes at the completion of a fixed-term contract are regularly provided for when contracts are agreed. If this agreement was entered into when Dee Forbes commenced her tenure in RTE, will she now, despite gross incompetence and the overseeing of widespread organisational dysfunction, receive such a payment? – Yours, etc

ANNE BERGIN,  
Co Kildare.

Sir, – Present and past governments are ultimately responsible for RTE's meltdown.

Decades of starving an important cultural resource of proper funds and quality checking its vision has let commercial interests morph our national broadcasting services into a “talent” casino. Give us ad-free national media and start respecting our intelligences. Imagine a public library selling advertising space on its bookshelves for

cars, holi stores and you'll get m ROBERT Co Wexf

Sir, – Wa little fun wit day (July 1 programme pieces (3) Yours, etc

MICHAEL Ballyshar

Sir, – Is RTE Player JUDITH Dublin 4.

Sir, – Do count exten fee and will of the beetr lotment for change for – Yours, etc, BETH NE Dublin 16