

## **NUS-USI response to consultation on draft budget 2015-16 and spending and saving proposals for Department of Agriculture and Rural Development**

### **(National Union of Students - Union of Students in Ireland)**

NUS-USI has significant concerns around the proposed cuts within DARD, and the impact that they could have upon the delivery of education and services for students at CAFRE. CAFRE is an extremely important educational institution and it delivers vital services to students.

We want to ensure that there are no cuts to CAFRE and that course places, education quality and student services can be maintained. It's vital that services around mental health and wellbeing for students are maintained in full. It is absolutely vital that the proposed new budget does not have a negative impact on students, on their wellbeing, their studies or upon their financial situation.

CAFRE offers significant specialised courses and it is absolutely essential that all of these courses, and the current number of course places can be maintained. Any reduction in the range and specialisation of the courses available, or in the number of student places, could have a very detrimental impact upon study options for students and could also have a negative impact upon the economy in terms of skills.

CAFRE plays such an important role in upskilling people and helping people reach their potential in a wide range of courses. The agri-food sector plays a vital role in our economy and it's crucial that CAFRE funding is maintained at current levels to ensure that it can continue to help meet the skills needs for this sector.

NUS-USI is extremely concerned to hear about discussions around potential cuts to staffing within the Department and there must be no cuts reduction in staffing imposed upon CAFRE.

We are extremely troubled about proposals around staff reduction outlined within the consultation document. We are very worried about the proposed reduction of around 300 to staffing and the impact that a voluntary staff exit scheme could have upon CAFRE or upon students studying at CAFRE. Current and future students must not suffer because

of the financial problems facing the Executive. DARD must prioritise spending on CAFRE to deliver the best outcomes.

## **Conclusions**

NUS-USI wants to see funding for CAFRE and for its student protected. We are extremely worried about the impact on staff reductions with the Department upon CAFRE, and we are opposed to anything that could have detrimental impact upon the institution. Education is about building for the future and CAFRE must be prioritised by the department. There must be no reduction in the number of course places or the range or number of courses offered at CAFRE. It is a vital institution which enables many students to reach their potential, and the organisation, its students' union and its students' services must be maintained in full.