

UNION OF STUDENTS IN IRELAND PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION FOR

# BUDGET 2019

**SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS**

**USI**

Union of Students in Ireland  
*Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn*

A Chairde,

At the night of the census in 2016, there were 429 homeless students in Ireland, this made up over 8% of the total homeless numbers. When the Government's student accommodation strategy was launched in July 2017, there was an excess demand in purpose built student accommodation of over 23,000 beds. This is expected to increase to almost 26,000 by 2019.

There has been a 2% increase in student numbers every year for the past decade and this is expected to continue for the next decade. Government have not build enough student accommodation to cover this increase, never mind the addressing shortage that currently exists.

It is becoming the norm for students to be charged €1,000 per month for a single room. Student accommodation will not fall back to affordable levels until we reduce the excess demand on beds in purpose built student accommodation. Rent pressure zones will not be enough and we cannot settle for just slowing down these increases, students are already being priced out of an education with extortionate accommodation costs and the second highest fees in Europe.

Well funded third-level education is the foundation of job creation, social equality, and a thriving economy. Meaningful investment in higher education is necessary if we are to meet a multitude of state objectives, such as having a highly skilled workforce which will subsequently attract foreign direct investment, or to be a country which is world-renowned for research and innovation.

Education is a public good and should be treated as such.

The third-level sector has struggled to perform during many years of austerity. USI believes that the sector should be praised for its efforts to deliver a quality education during a sustained period of under-investment and uncertainty. However, what is necessary as a response to crisis is not sustainable as a long-term model. It's time to match talk of economic recovery with strategic investment in this essential public service.

The proposals in this submission, if implemented in Budget 2019, would have a significant impact on the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of students and their families. USI also believe that Budget 2019 presents an opportunity to both increase revenue and reduce environmental costs associated with single use cups and excess carbon pollution.

We encourage you to read this document and to take on board our recommendations. Students and Students' Union representatives from your constituency will be in contact with you over the coming days and weeks, we ask that you meet with them and hear what they have to say.

Go raibh maith agat



*Michael Kerrigan*

Michael Kerrigan  
President 2017/18  
Union of Students in Ireland



*Síona Cahill*

Síona Cahill  
President 2018/19  
Union of Students in Ireland

# Why should we increase investment in third-level education?

Supporting lifelong learning requires investment that matches the growing needs of a diverse range of students across age groups, backgrounds, and modes of study.



**€12,495**  
Cost of living  
per annum  
while studying at  
Third Level

**25,754**



**EXTRA BEDS**  
needed in student  
accommodation  
by 2019

Average **rental costs**  
increased

**11.5%**



in Q1 2018 alone

**Ireland**  
**4th**

in world  
For **suicide rates**  
among men aged 18-24 yrs



In January 2018  
Youth Unemployment  
was **13.7%**

Nearly 3 times the national  
average



**ONLY**  
**2.6%**  
of postgraduate  
students  
report having a disability

Ireland could be penalised



**€450million** ≠

For missing 2020 greenhouse  
gas reduction targets

Higher Education needs

**€1.26bn**

Investment by 2030



# SUMMARY OF COSTED RECOMMENDATIONS



In this submission, USI recommends to Government a number of priorities for investment and revenue generation in Budget 2019.

## INVESTMENT

### Towards Publicly Funded Education For All

#### Accommodation

Immediate capital investment in student accommodation to meet the minimum targets set out in the National Strategy.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€100,000**  
per bed space

#### Grant Investment

Increase in thresholds and grant allocation through SUSI.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€14.9 million**

#### Student Contribution Charge

Reduce the burden placed on students through the Student Contribution Charge.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€36.8 million**

#### Apprenticeship Fees

Remove the fee burden placed on Apprentices.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€4.2 million**

### Supporting Education

#### Gaeltacht Placement Fees

Restore the grant for student teachers' mandatory Gaeltacht attendance.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€2 million**

#### Students on Placement

Financially support the significant costs placed on student teachers during placements.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€50 million**

#### Grant Adjacency Rates

Government must restore the 2011 SUSI Grant Adjacency Rates.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€26 million**

### Part-Time and Further Education Student Support

The Government must commit to supporting all students who seek to gain a post-secondary education in Ireland.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€7.5 million**

### Postgraduate Student Grants

Government must recognise the need to support our growing postgraduate student community.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€40 million**

### Student Assistance Fund

Government must begin to restore SAF to pre-2012 rates.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€1.5 million**

## Supporting Mental Health

### Mental Health Funding

To address the mental health crisis, funding must be ring-fenced annually.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€55 million**

### Counselling Services on Third-Level Campuses

Government must invest in mental health counselling to reduce the strain on support services.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€3 million**

## Supporting Our Young People

### Social Welfare for Under-26

Young people must no longer be discriminated against when accessing Jobseekers' Allowance.

**INVESTMENT**  
**€81.2 million**

## REVENUE GENERATION

### Supporting Our Environment

#### Single Use Cup Levy - 'Latte Levy'

Government should do more to encourage sustainability and environmentalism.

**€40 million**  
**p/a**

#### Carbon Tax

We must do more to protect the environment from harm for the sake of our future.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## TOWARDS PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION FOR ALL

Accommodation	1
Grant Investment	2
Student Contribution	3
Apprenticeship fee	4

## SUPPORTING EDUCATION

Grant Adjacency rates	6
Postgraduate Student Grants	7
Part-time and further education student support	8
Gaeltacht Placement Fees	9
Students Teacher Placement	10
Student Assistance Fund	11

## SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Funding	13
Counselling Services on Third-level Campuses	15

## SUPPORTING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Social Welfare for under 26	17
-----------------------------	----

## SUPPORTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Single use cup levy 'Latte Levy'	19
Carbon Tax	20

# TOWARDS PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION FOR ALL

*Third level education will never be truly accessible unless we fund it as a public good.*



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# TOWARDS PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION FOR ALL

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## ACCOMMODATION

*Affordable, quality housing is not a luxury; it is a necessity to creating a successful learning environment.*

**Proposal:** For the government to provide a capital grant specifically for HEI's development of student accommodation.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** The Government's National Student Accommodation Strategy outlined that, as of July 2017, there was an excess demand of purpose built student accommodation of 23,634 beds. This is expected to increase to 25,754 beds in July 2019 before we see a reduction to 20,986 in 2024.

With substantial rent increases in the private rented sector and a projected increase in student numbers in the years ahead, an increased provision of designated student accommodation has the potential to ease ongoing demand pressures in the private rented sector. The provision of additional student accommodation ensures additional benefits to the wider economy and society through the economic activity that it generates and through the development of localities in less commercially attractive areas.

In terms of economic activity, it is estimated that 200 jobs are created during the construction phase of a €150m project with resultant VAT, PAYE and PRSI receipts. In addition, a considerable number of additional permanent campus jobs would be created in maintenance and management of any new development and, of course, in the provision of education itself.

Data collected by the HEA shows that while there are substantial capital costs, on-campus accommodation can also provide a sustainable income stream for the HEI over the longer term which should be considered positively in the context of the current work of the Higher Education Funding Group.

International research has shown that students living in on-campus accommodation have higher rates of retention than commuter students (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Thomas 2012 as quoted by Gormley 2015 P.1), and also exhibit higher scores on developmental scales (Chickering and Reisser, 1993 as quoted by Gormley 2015 P.1).

In addition, Enterprise Ireland estimated that a direct economic impact of around €345m resulted from expenditure by international students in higher education in 2012, with a further €120m from related friends and family tourism. The availability of campus accommodation is a prerequisite for attracting new overseas students, with the projected increases in international student numbers putting further pressure on availability of student accommodation.

There is also currently a significant demand for bed spaces for students with disabilities. This demand is not being met by the available supply, and is not meeting the needs of a diverse group with both physical and invisible disabilities. On campus accommodation is generally regarded as the preferred option to enhance student participation and this is significantly more so the case for students with disabilities.

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**INVESTMENT: €100,000 per bed space**  
**(Excluding costs associated with land purchase)**

# TOWARDS PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION FOR ALL

## GRANT INVESTMENT

*The Government must do more to support students as the cost of living continues to rise.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to restore threshold and allocation given through the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant scheme to pre-2011 rates, and to commit to annual increases to grants that reflect the cost of living.

**Responsibility:** The Department for Education and Skills, The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

**Rationale:** The DIT Campus Life survey details that on average the total cost to attend third level education in Dublin is €12,495 per annum. While USI welcomes the extension and increase in eligibility requirements for grants in recent years, especially in Budget 2017 for postgraduates, these measures do not go far enough after years of cutbacks to the grant and do not offset the impact of rising living costs.

**PLC & Undergraduate Grant Levels (Maintenance Levels)**

Levels of Grant	Maintenance Non-Adjacent Rate 2011/12	Maintenance Adjacent Rate 2011/12	Maintenance Non-Adjacent Rate 2017/18	Maintenance Adjacent Rate 2017/18 (€)
PLC & Undergraduate Grant Levels (Maintenance Levels)				
	€	€	€	€
Special Rate of Maintenance Grant	6,100	2,445	5,915	2,375
Standard Rate 100% Maintenance	3,120	1,250	3,025	1,215
Standard Rate 75% Maintenance	2,340	940	2,270	910
Standard Rate 50% Maintenance	1,560	625	1,515	605
Standard Rate 25% Maintenance	780	315	755	305

Source: <https://susi.ie/>

Grants were cut by 4% in 2011, and again by 3% in 2012. The graph below outlines the comparison from 2011 with current rates:

The DIT campus life survey outlines that the monthly expenditure, which excludes fees, for a student living away from home is €1,222. Grants do not come close to covering such costs, even at the highest rate of €678 per month. The Strategy for Funding Higher Education (2016) states that an additional €100 million over next three to five years would be needed to fund student financial aid. This funding must ensure that the rate of grant is increased to match rising costs of living, linking grants to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) consumer price index (CPI). From March 2017 to March 2018 CPI rose by 0.2% amounting to an additional cost of just €341,000 if grants were adjusted. Thresholds must also be adjusted to allow middle income earners to be able to access the SUSI grant.

## INVESTMENT: €14.9 million

# TOWARDS PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION FOR ALL

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## STUDENT CONTRIBUTION CHARGE

*Ireland has the second highest tuition fees in the EU after dramatic increases. It's time to reduce that burden on students and their families.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to reduce the annual Student Contribution Charge by a minimum of €500.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills, Department of Finance

**Rationale:** The Student Contribution Charge jumped from €1500 to €2000 in Budget 2011 and continued to increase in increments of €250 until it reached €3000 in 2015. A decrease in fee level would come at a relatively small cost to the state and alleviate pressure on the payment of fees that have doubled over a period of six years. The Student Contribution Charge is abnormally high by European standards, and second only to the United Kingdom within in the EU.

The DIT Campus Life Cost of Living Guide (17/18) estimates the cost of living while studying at third-level at €12,495 per annum. This figure represents the variety of costs that students face in order to get by daily, of which the Student Contribution Charge is the second largest component after rent. The only cost of attending third-level that can be directly addressed in the Budget is the Student Contribution Charge.

USI proposes that the government reduce the current financial burden on students, and incrementally replace the contribution with direct funding to higher education institutions, beginning with a €500 reduction of the Student Contribution Charge in Budget 2019.

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**INVESTMENT: €36.8 million**

# TOWARDS PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION FOR ALL

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## APPRENTICESHIP FEES

*Growing the number of Apprenticeships should not amount to a growing debt burden on Apprentices.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to overturn the decision in Budget 2014 to impose the new pro-rata Student Contribution and reinstate the State contribution in order to remove apprenticeship fees.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** There is a growing need to reverse the significant debt burden placed on students across successive Budgets during the austerity years. This is no different for our Apprentices.

In Budget 2014 the decision was taken to impose a pro-rata Student Contribution charge, with SOLAS no longer making payment to the Institutes of Technology of 70% of the Apprenticeship fee. Previously the Institutes of Technology levied the fee from FÁS and SOLAS, with Apprentices paying the remainder for examination fees with the burden placed on Apprentices at €1,000 per annum typically, at a cost of €3,000 over the course of the programme (usually 3 years).

The Programme for Government (p. 47) states that “In partnership with the Apprenticeship Council and industry the Government will double the number of Apprenticeships to provide a total of 31,000 places by 2020 through an annual call for new proposals. We will target over 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy and in every region in Ireland.” The total number of registered apprentices grew from 3,153 in 2015 to 4,843 in 2017, however, the stated Government target of 5,089 does not look like it will be met in 2018.

It is imperative that work-based learning and apprenticeships are delivered to fulfil the promise of the Youth Guarantee, especially given that the European Commission has confirmed that the Department of Education and Skills is in a position to obtain a portion of Youth Employment Initiative Funds to cover apprentice fees. Ireland’s allocation currently stands at €68m, with matched funding from the ESF and the Exchequer bringing that to €204m. Furthermore, only 1% of Apprentices are women, and without significant investment this figure can only improve at a very slow pace.

In Germany annual fees of €1,000 introduced in some states prompted a backlash and led to nationwide protest. Tuition fees were subsequently phased out and abolished in the 2014/15 academic year. Germany’s VET system, especially its wide ranging apprenticeship offering, is recognised abroad. When launching the national call for apprenticeship expansion the success of the German model was directly referenced, so if we are to replicate that as a nation, it is imperative we do not place financial barriers to access on learners. Given the struggle to meet national targets, and a recognition that apprenticeships are imperative to ensuring our young people do not become NEET, we must remove such barriers.

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**INVESTMENT: €4.2 million**

# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

*Growing access to a diverse system of education and training requires commitment; Government must demonstrate that commitment through investment after years of cuts.*



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# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

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## GRANT ADJACENCY RATES

*The Government must reverse Budget 2011 cuts*

**Proposal:** For the Government to reverse the decision taken in Budget 2011 and decrease the qualifying criteria for the non-adjacent rate of the grant from 45km to 24km.

**Responsibility:** The Department for Education and Skills; The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

**Rationale:** The current qualifying distance of 45 km intends to take into account a reasonable distance which students may commute on a daily basis. However this puts many students at an disadvantage, especially those from outside major urban areas for a variety of reasons. This includes that rural public transport links are inadequate for students who need to be in class in the mornings, or later in the evening.

Example: Birr Co. Offaly (population 5,741) is 40 km from its nearest third level institution, Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). The earliest a student can arrive in AIT by direct bus is 1.25pm.

The adjacent rate of grant is supposed to reflect that many students are in a position to commute, however the cost of travel may be comparable to a living cost in the college town, defeating the purpose of this rate and ignoring the fact that students may wish to live independently during study.

Example: Killarney, Co.Kerry (population 14,504) is 36 km from its nearest third level institution, IT Tralee. The cost of public transport to travel from Killarney to IT Tralee, if booked online, is €68.50 per week by bus or €69.90 per week by train. Student accommodation in Tralee is available from €70.00 per week in Kings Court Student Accommodation.

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**INVESTMENT: €26 million**

# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

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## POSTGRADUATE STUDENT GRANTS

*Without financial support for postgraduate students Ireland will never fully realise the potential of postgraduate education and training.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to fully restore the postgraduate grant to pre-2012 levels.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** The postgraduate maintenance grant was abolished in Budget 2012, leaving postgraduate students facing high fee barriers and no support for living costs. This problem has been further exacerbated by a lack of fee regulation for postgraduate programmes, while institutional support and hardship funds have been prioritised and promoted primarily for the benefit of undergraduates. Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education stated that:

“The removal of maintenance supports for postgraduate students is of particular concern and there is real risk that some socio-economic groups could be locked out of a range of professions such as teaching as a result.”

The Programme for a Partnership Government contained a commitment “to increase support for postgraduates with a particular focus on those from low income households.” USI welcomes the investment of €4m in Budget 2017 and a further €3m in Budget 2018 for maintenance grants for postgrads, benefiting some 1,100 of the most disadvantaged students. However, without full reinstatement, the reality of financial strain that our postgraduate community is under will not be addressed by Government.

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**INVESTMENT: €40 million**

# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

## PART-TIME AND FURTHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

*Education is not a one-size-fits-all, but that should not mean that a student can be denied access to financial safety nets because of their chosen pathway.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to commit to part-time and further education students receiving the same supports that would be available to full-time students in similar circumstances and make a hardship fund available for students who are studying part-time and in further education.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** A number of support funds, including the Fund for Student with Disabilities, the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) and the Maintenance Grant are only available for students studying on a full-time basis in recognised Higher Education Institutions.

Part-time students are currently not able to avail of the same supports (despite the National Access strategy recommendations). The same restrictions apply to students in further education, of which there were 127,165 students enrolled in 2016, according to SOLAS.

The participation rate of Students with Disabilities in full time courses (5.9%) is almost 5 times the participation rate in part time courses (1.3%). There are likely many complex reasons for this, but anecdotal evidence from AHEAD, published in 2014, suggests that it is due to the lack of funding for disability supports in the part time sector.

It is unfair to punish students who are trying to further themselves through education but due to circumstance cannot commit to attend a higher education institution in a full-time capacity.

**Case Study:** A student who is deaf but is studying part-time cannot access the current Fund for Students with Disabilities, and has no access to support for costly sign language interpretation, and thus it is impossible to compete at a level playing field with their peers.

**Costing:** €5m is needed for the Part Time Education sector as a Student Assistance Fund support. €2.5m should be allocated to students who are in Further Education as a hardship fund.

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**INVESTMENT: €7.5 million**

# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

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## GAELTACHT PLACEMENT FEES

*Gaeilge is a part of the nation's identity, so Government should do all we can to support student teachers as they immerse themselves in the language for the benefit of future generations.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to restore grants for student teachers' attendance at mandatory Gaeltacht courses.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** Gaeltacht placement is a mandatory part of many teaching courses, and since the 2012/2013 academic year, any student beginning a programme of initial primary teacher education must self-fund fees relating to three weeks of mandatory Gaeltacht placement in a Gaeltacht area. Previously these costs had been covered by a €637 state grant in order to promote the attendance of the Gaeltacht courses and also to lessen the financial strain on students as they undertook this mandatory training. The annual cost of this grant, with roughly 1,350 participants, was in the region of €860,000.

In 2012, a Gaeltacht Placement Working Group report to the Teaching Council cautioned that the withdrawal of this funding for student teacher placement was 'a matter of serious concern and may deter persons from disadvantaged social backgrounds from enrolling on programmes of initial teacher education.' In September 2014, the Minister for Education acknowledged 'that the funding of the Gaeltacht Placement is a significant cost to students and their families' and estimated the cost of restoring the grant for the extended four week placement at €1 million per annum.

Since this Gaeltacht grant provision has been removed, students have been forced to self-fund this mandatory training on a yearly basis, which incurs significant cost, and puts further financial pressure on them. Costs include transport, accommodation, and tuition, as well as the potential of lost earnings from part-time employment at home while the student is attending the mandatory placement.

Moreover, these students, engaging in these programmes of initial teacher education, have significant amounts of contact hours per week, ranging from 18 to 30 hours a week, with added responsibilities regarding mandatory placement periods and lesson plan preparation.

The findings of USI's Student Teachers Placement Report in 2018 found that the Gaeltacht placement fee was the most significant financial cost on trainee teachers. The report also found that up to 42% of trainee teachers had considered dropping out due to the financial pressure of the course, and noted that the Gaeltacht placement costs '[were] the biggest motivation for working part-time while on placement.'

A previous Minister for Education and Skills has indicated that support is available to these students through Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) but is only available to students who already receive maintenance payments through SUSI. USI proposed the reinstatement of the state grant to cover all four weeks of mandatory placement for students and supports submissions made by the INTO on this matter.

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**INVESTMENT: €2 million**

# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

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## STUDENT TEACHER PLACEMENT

*For too long our educators of tomorrow have faced huge barriers to completion. Now is the time to ease the pressures they face.*

**Proposal:** For the government to provide 80% of the entry level rate to student teachers during their placement.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** The USI Student Teacher Placement Report, based on survey research with over 3,000 responses, found that student teachers are struggling financially during their placement. 59% of student teachers work between 20-35 hours a week on placement with 71% of those students also working part-time to cover placement costs.

The DIT Campus Life Cost of Living Guide (2017/18) estimates the cost of living while studying at third-level at €12,495 per annum. The sum is made up of many different costs, of which the student contribution charge is the second largest after rent.

However, from the USI research it is clear that student teachers have to contribute between €31-€60 extra on resources and materials per week, with between €21- €40 a week on travel to their placement and an additional €1,500 for the Gaeltacht fee.

42% of student teachers when asked, said they have considered dropping out due to financial pressures.

USI would welcome an appropriate salary to be paid whilst students are on placement, such as the one paid to nursing students who receive 80% of the entry level rates. This financial support would cover resource and material costs in class, travel to their placement, and accommodation.

Whilst on placement, teachers in initial teacher education should be supported by government in similar ways to how other professionals in training are supported.

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**INVESTMENT: €50 million**

# SUPPORTING EDUCATION

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## STUDENT ASSISTANCE FUND

*Many students encounter financial hardship in their time in education, but available funds must reflect growing need.*

**Proposal:** Government must begin to restore SAF to 2012 rates to reflect the real cost of participating in Higher Education.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Rationale:** Budget 2019 should increase the financial support allocated to the SAF and address the shortfall in funding to this student-centred resource.

USI welcomed the additional allocation of €1.5million in the 2016 budget, but it is clear that this figure does not meet the needs required of SAF in our HEIs and a phased increase is needed back to €11 million over the next 2 budgets. The allocation under the Fund in 2017 was €8.1 million (Written Answers, 29 June 2017).

The SAF provides financial assistance for full-time higher education students experiencing financial difficulties while attending college. Students apply for student assistance to help with either temporary or ongoing financial difficulties that put them at risk of dropping out of college.

The SAF provides an alternative source of funding for higher education students in addition to the student grant (SUSI) and often assists students who may not qualify under for SUSI by marginal amounts. Each year, the State allocates a specific amount of student assistance funding to all publicly funded higher education colleges based on the size of the college's full-time student population. For example DCU received €352,161 in 2014 whereas St. Angela's college in Sligo received €19,561 the same year (Written Answers, June 9 2016). SAF funding is used up in the first semester or before Christmas each year but differs according to institution (although all are under severe strain in their allocations). SAF support is required to ensure that students are supported and continue in their studies. According to NERI in 2015, 15.2% of those living below the poverty line in Ireland were students, while Daft.ie reported that the cost of renting has increased on average by 11.5% nationally.

The average public transport costs for students have nearly doubled over the past decade from €720 to €1,215 (DIT Campus Life). The costs attached to attending college have risen exponentially while supports have decreased, and students are suffering the consequences.

The SAF is also not currently available to Further Education/PLC colleges or part-time students. In addition, Postgraduate students receive very little due to priority given to undergraduate students. The fund must be restored to 2012 rates of €11m.. While the process of allocation varies across institutions, the levels of funding are still not meeting the pressing need to ensure student retention and support urgently needed in the system.

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## INVESTMENT:

**2019 Budget + €1.5m to 9.6m**

**2020 Budget + €1.5m to €11.1m**

# SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

*USI understands the importance of positive mental health and access to services when needed. Current provisions are not fit for purpose and need immediate action in line with many action plans and research papers*



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# SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

## MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

*Current mental health provision is totally inadequate to meet the growing crisis among our young people.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to ring-fence funding of €55m annually to increase national mental health services and to put emphasis on local 24/7 crisis intervention services.

**Responsibility:** Department of Health

**Rationale:** USI calls on the Government to produce a detailed, time-lined Action Plan to continue the reform of mental health supports and improve the mental health of the whole population, in line with A Vision for Change (2006), Healthy Ireland Framework (2013) and Connecting for Life (2015), ensuring that adequate funding and the structures for good governance and oversight of the plan are in place.

The implementation of a 24/7 intervention service within our health service and local communities is vital and should be a priority alongside annual ring fenced funding from Budget 2019.

The suicide prevention framework Connecting for Life (2013) has made a commitment to running out a national quality assured and co-ordinated 24/7 service for individuals in need of mental health care which has yet to be implemented.

Currently individuals are forced to use Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments in hospitals as an intervention service, with staff and professionals not being adequately trained to respond and support someone in mental or emotional distress. Over a decade after A Vision for Change (2006), the recommendations to provide community based services, crisis homes and intervention support services are not available. Patients need access to services which are life saving and care for those affected in their communities.

46% of under 35 year olds would conceal a mental health difficulty from family, friends or colleagues, This is 12% higher than the average for those aged over 35 years.

It is proposed that there should be a 'crisis house' within each catchment area. This would offer brief accommodation to service users who need a safe place to recover their bearings, while work with the CMHT to evolve a care plan that will address the key factors that have precipitated their crisis.

The environment of an A & E department as a referral for those in distress coupled with lack of present expertise surrounding mental and emotional health is severely damaging for students.

In 2016, the Registry recorded 11,485 presentations to hospital due to self-harm nationally. Figures of 399 of the people who died by suicide in Ireland, while at the moment Ireland ranks 4th in the world for Suicide rates among young men between 18- 24 year olds.

From the EU Youth Report (2015), Ireland is ranked within the top 4 for suicide rate among 15-24 year olds. This further confirms CSO figures on suicides in 2013 by comparing the suicide rate of 14.4 per 100,000 to the UK at 7.6 per 100,000 (Dr Gary McDonald). USI with Mental Health Reform, propose the Government invest in mental health supports and services.

“There is a strong economic basis for investment in mental health services. The Healthy Ireland framework reports that the economic cost of mental health problems in Ireland is €11B per year, much of which is related to loss of productivity. In 2008, it was identified that mental health difficulties cost the Irish economy around €3B or 2% of GNP annually and most of the costs are in the labour market as a result of lost employment, absenteeism, lost productivity and premature retirement.” - Mental Health Reform Pre Budget Submission 2018

The Union of Students in Ireland, as part of Mental Health Reform, want to ensure the continuation of building staffing levels across mental health services, and in line with “A Vision for Change” recommendations:

- Develop 24/7 crisis intervention mental health services across the country
- Implement a national, electronic mental health information system
- Increase capacity of national advocacy services for both children and adults with mental health difficulties in hospitals, day centres, training centres, clinics.

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**INVESTMENT:€55 millon**

# SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

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## COUNSELLING SERVICES ON THIRD LEVEL CAMPUSES

*With a 40% increase in students seeking counselling services, and waiting lists of an average of 6 weeks, vital services need protecting to ensure students have the best chance of early intervention, wellbeing, reaching their academic potential and retention in higher education.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to ring fence funding for counselling services on third level campuses.

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills, Department of Health

**Rationale:** Ireland has some of the highest levels of participation in third-level education within the European Union. The importance of promoting positive mental health among the large third-level student population cannot be underestimated, with A Vision for Change (2006) research showing a high percentage of students experiencing mental health difficulties including depression, anxiety, loneliness, substance misuse and suicidal behaviour while indicating that almost 75% of all mental disorders first emerge between the ages of 15 and 25.

The provision of counselling services to meet the growing numbers and diverse needs of students has not increased in line with the rising student numbers attending 3rd level and the increasing pressures associated with being a student, especially financially.

In 2017 the numbers of full-time enrolments to third level courses was 181,039, while part-time enrolments to third level courses was 39,625, and entrants to third level courses was 43,987. This represented a significant growth year on year, while there was a 40% increase in students seeking help from counselling services on campuses.

The PCHEI have reported international best practice indicates counselling staff to student ratio should be one counsellor to 1,500 students. The PCHEI, states it can vary from one to 2,000 or even 3,000 students — however there are cases of just one counsellor to 3,500 students.

61.6% of students are experiencing burnout while attending third level while 27.6% in college have dropped out due to stress (USI Student Dropout Survey, 2016). Interestingly, PCHEI figures from 2014 show 27% of students who used counselling services said it was a factor in their staying on at college.

It is clear from the research that students are in dire need of counselling services that are fit for purpose, needing adequate ring fenced funding from each higher education institutions' budget. These allocations for counselling services, infrastructure and mental health supports need to be protected to ensure student wellbeing, academic performance and retention. In order to ensure that this can happen, at a cost of €45,000 per Counsellor, USI is advocating for a minimum of one additional counsellor per college with allocation realigned to meet the above mentioned ratio, at an estimate of €3million.

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**INVESTMENT: €3 million**



# SUPPORTING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

*Access to education and the labour market does not just rely on initiatives and strategies, but requires action to improve the socio-economic conditions of young people and their families. Inequalities and barriers must be removed.*



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# SUPPORTING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

## EQUALITY IN SOCIAL WELFARE FOR UNDER-26s

*The government must reverse the decision to reduce rates of Jobseekers' Allowance for young people.*

**Proposal:** For the Government to set the rate for all people under the age of 26, who are currently on reduced Jobseekers rates, to the maximum adult rate of allowance per week.

**Responsibility:** Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

**Rationale:** In Budget 2010, the government took a decision to reduce social welfare rates for under 26 year olds. In 2013, those aged 25 years and older were in receipt of €188 per week, those aged 22-24 years were in receipt of €144 and those aged between 18 and 21, were in receipt of €100. In 2014, social welfare rates were again changed to only allow for those aged 26 and over receive the maximum rate of €188, and 25 year olds to receive €144 and people aged between 18 and 24 years of age, to receive the lowest payment of €100.

The decision to further cut social welfare payments for those under 25, (in Budget 2014) was a financial penalty for unemployed graduates and youths in Ireland with 39% of young people struggling to make ends meet nationally. In Budget 2017, the maximum personal rate for an adult aged 25 was increased from €144.00 to €147.80, while those aged 18-24 saw an increase from €100 to €102.70. In Budget 2018, the maximum personal rate for all claimants of Jobseekers' Allowance was increased by €5, however, this was still proportional. The breakdown of increases since 2016 can be found below.

The youth unemployment rate (15-24 year olds) was 13.7% in January 2018, down from 14.6% in 2016, but still more than double the national average of 5.2% of those aged 25-74 years of age. With young people lacking necessary experience in a competitive Labour Market, and a timeframe of up to 12 months being unemployed to enter JobPlus to further obtain employment and skills, young people cannot survive on the current Jobseekers' Allowances with the cost of living of a single adult being €184 per week, according to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice in 2013. With the cost of living having increased significantly since 2013, the increase of just €5 is still not enough for those under 26 to reach the minimum essential standards of living in 2017.

	Aged 26 and over			Aged 25			Aged 18-24		
Year	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
<b>Max. Personal Rate</b>	€188	€193	€198	€144	€147.80	€152.80	€100	€102.70	€107.70
<b>Increase for a qualified adult</b>	€124.80	€128.10	€131.40	€124.80	€128.10	€131.40	€124.80	€128.10	€131.40

The MESL 2017 Update Report states:

“The cost of an MESL for an unemployed young adult living in the family home in 2017 is €151.00 which is higher than rates of JA for under 25’s (€102.70) and for those aged 25 (€147.80). The MESL cost is based on a young adult living as part of the parental household and qualifying for a full medical card. The reduced rate of JSA continues to fall short of providing an MESL for adults under 26 despite increases made this year, and an individual in this situation would require significant support from their family in order to afford an MESL.”

The same report additionally states that a young person would experience a significant income inadequacy if living outside of the family home and receiving the full rate of Jobseekers’ Allowance. Many graduates continue to have difficulty accessing high-quality relevant employment immediately following graduation and may need to access social welfare during their time spent unemployed.

USI is calling on the government to reverse the discriminatory decision to reduce Jobseekers’ Allowance rates for those aged under 26 in Budget 2019, which can significantly negatively impact new graduates who are seeking employment and allow for all claimants of Jobseekers’ Allowance to be treated equally and receive the maximum personal rate.

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**INVESTMENT: €81.2 million**

# SUPPORTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

*USI believes the Government should do more to encourage sustainability and environmentalism. Students want to play their part in a greener Ireland.*



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# SUPPORTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

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## SINGLE USE CUP LEVY - 'LATTE LEVY'

*USI calls upon the government to reconsider the introduction of the Latte Levy on single use cups, recognising that Ireland must do more to play its part in saving our planet.*

**Proposal:** USI calls upon the government to reconsider the introduction of a levy on disposable coffee/tea cups at €0.20 per cup.

**Responsibility:** Department of Communications, Climate Change & Environment

**Rationale:** Approximately two million plastic cups are thrown away each day in Ireland. These cups are non-recyclable due to the plastic film lining the inside. A levy would incentivise people to use reusable cups thus reducing the number of cups being thrown away each day and help fund the battle for waste reduction.

The Waste Reduction Bill suggests that the Government bring in a two-tier latte levy - €0.15 for non-compostable coffee cups and €0.05 for compostable coffee cups. Ireland uses and disposes 200 million take away coffee cups per annum. This levy outlined in the bill would generate €20 million.

Although USI support the idea of a levy set out by the Waste Reduction bill, we are asking the government to consider a higher levy of €0.20 per cup.

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**REVENUE GENERATION: €40 million p/a**  
**(200 million cups x€0.20)**

# SUPPORTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

## CARBON TAX

*Ireland has an opportunity to position itself as an international leader in environmental sustainability, but currently it is failing to live up to our reputation of being green.*

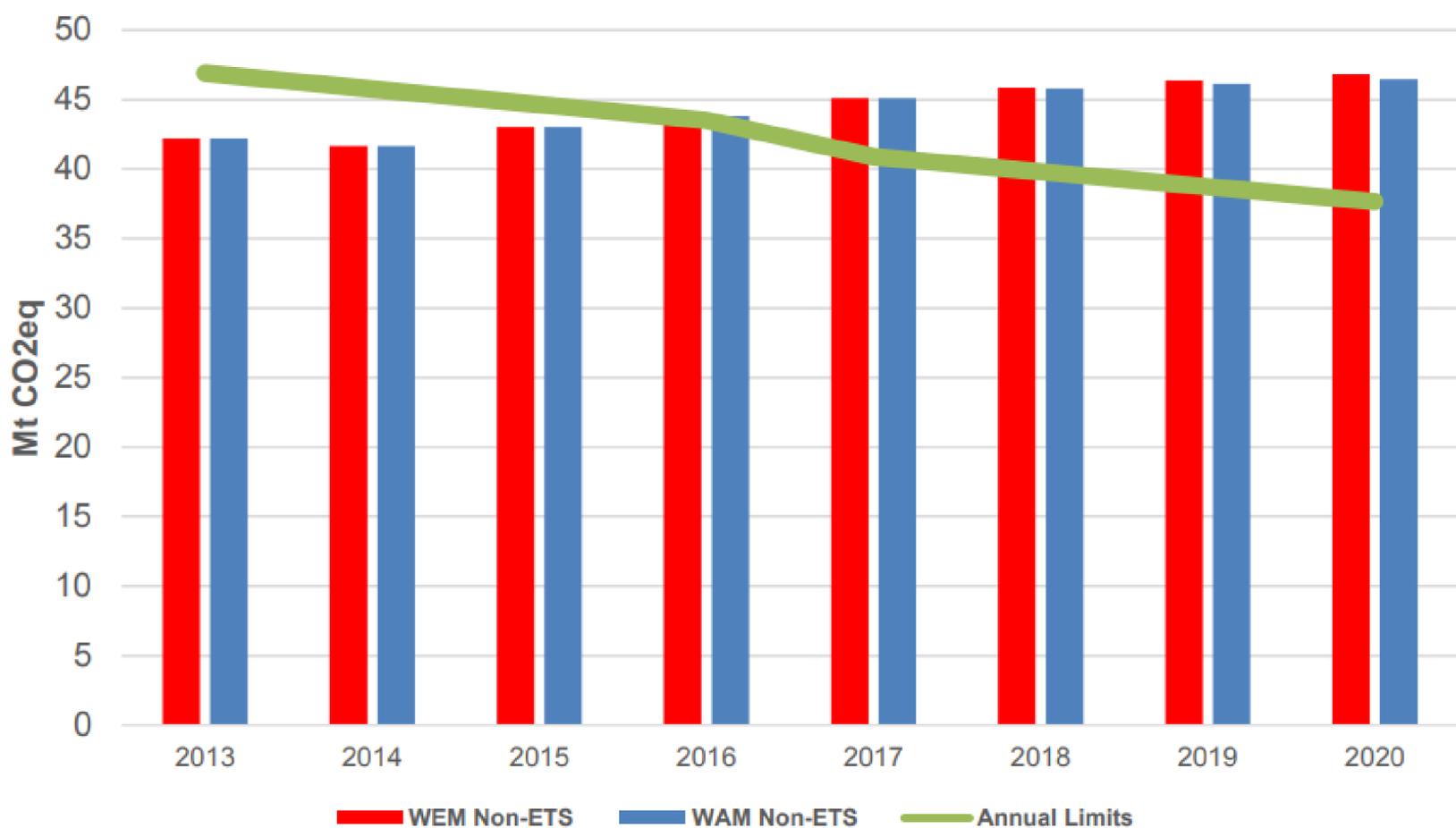
**Proposal:** USI calls upon the Government to raise the rate of carbon tax in the upcoming budget as a means of addressing failures in Ireland’s climate change commitments and generating further revenue.

**Responsibility:** Department of Finance, Department of Communications, Climate Change & Environment

**Rationale:** According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland is required to deliver a 20% reduction in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 (relative to 2005 levels). However Ireland is not only projected to fail to meet that target, but will have only made a 0%-1% reduction by 2020. Ireland exceeded its annual binding limits for the first time in 2016, and is not on the right trajectory to meet future EU emissions reduction commitments.

Increasing the rate of carbon tax is the cheapest way to reduce carbon emissions, thus avoiding future costly penalties from the EU, and would demonstrate our country’s commitment to progressive sustainability and climate change action. In addition, this would generate more income to be spent in the budget. Ireland could be set to face penalties in the region of €450 million for missing 2020 targets.

The carbon tax collected in 2017 was €419.6million, but at this time it is not possible to state how much additional revenue could be collected if the rates were raised. Government should commit to undertaking this work in Budget 2019.



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**90,000**

**THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS  
DIRECTLY REGISTERED TO VOTE BY  
USI IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS.**



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