

**USI 60**

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

# THE CRISIS NEVER ENDED



The **Union of Students in Ireland** Pre-Budget Submission for

# **BUDGET 2020**

**CÁINISNÉIS 2020**

# Introduction from President and President-Elect

## Fáiltiú ón Uachtarán agus an tUachtarán Tofa

### A CHAIRDE,

Following Brexit, students in Ireland will be forced to pay the highest third level fees in the EU.

Accommodation costs and the cost of living has soared, while financial support available for students has remained stagnant - these issues are connected and are placing students and their families in extremely challenging financial situations.

Students and their families suffered years of austerity and cutbacks during the crisis - but that has given way to years of neglect and indecision. **The crisis never ended.**

The higher education sector has seen a managed decline in funding over the past decade, and struggled to maintain it's high standard. The position taken by the Government to invest in competition-based funding, over core funding - has resulted in the sector being squeezed to crisis point with little sustainable or strategic vision.

We're being told Ireland is "bouncing back" and is "in recovery", but that has not been the reality of a tertiary education sector, vital to societal and economic growth - left on a cliff edge.

Access to education also means access to suitable and affordable accommodation while studying. You may be forgiven for thinking that there is plenty of rooms being built, however that is not the case. What is in fact luxury student accommodation being developed can cost upwards of €1,000 per month. This is not acceptable. It is not what students or their families want or can afford, and is severely restricting access for the most marginalised groups in particular - across every community and constituency in Ireland.

The proposals in this submission, if implemented in Budget 2020, would have a significant impact on the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of students and their families. We encourage you to support our recommendations and we look forward to discussing them further with you.

**Demand a better future.**



Síona Cahill  
President 2018/19  
Union of Students in Ireland



Lorna Fitzpatrick  
President 2019/20  
Union of Students in Ireland

# The Pressure is Rising on the Students of Ireland

## Tá Brú Millteanach ar na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

We must increase public funding for third-level education if we truly believe that education is a lifelong pursuit that creates equality of opportunity and outcomes for all our people.

SUSI GRANT RECIPIENTS NUMBERS HAVE FALLEN BY **4,022** (5%) IN A PERIOD OF 4 YEARS, SUSI EXPENDITURE WAS CUT BY **€2 MILLION** IN 2019



STUDENTS ON THE NON-ADJACENT SUSI GRANT HAVE FALLEN FROM **77%** IN 2011 TO JUST **52%** IN 2018. THIS WILL CONTINUE TO FALL AS MORE CHOOSE TO COMMUTE

STUDENT NUMBERS ARE AT A RECORD HIGH OF **235,644** IN 2017/2018



THE NUMBERS OF STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES HAS RISEN AT A RATE OF **127%** SINCE 2014



RENTS ROSE BY **8.3%** ON AVERAGE IN Q1 2019. RENTS HAVE RISEN CONTINUOUSLY FOR 27 QUARTERS IN A ROW



ONLY **4%** OF APPRENTICES ARE WOMEN

IRELAND WILL BE PENALISED **€240 MILLION** FOR EVERY % POINT MISSED IN OUR GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION TARGETS BY 2020



HIGHER EDUCATION NEEDS **€1.26 BILLION** INVESTMENT BY 2030

# SUMMARY OF COSTED RECOMMENDATIONS

## Achoimre ar na Moltaí Costáilte

In this submission, USI recommends to Government a number of priorities for investment in our crumbling third-level sectors and for the benefit of our struggling students.



## INVESTMENT

## Infheistíocht

### GRANTS

#### STUDENT CONTRIBUTION

#### CHARGE:

**€38 MILLION**

SUSI Grant investment is urgently required as the financial burden and cost of living for students soars.

#### GRANT ADJACENCY RATES:

**€26 MILLION**

#### POSTGRADUATE STUDENT GRANTS:

**€40 MILLION**

### FEES

#### GRANT INVESTMENT:

**€14.9 MILLION**

Students have shouldered the burden of government cuts. It is time to reduce and reverse that burden.

#### APPRENTICESHIP FEES:

**€4.8 MILLION**

#### POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STIPENDS:

**€3 MILLION**

#### GAELTACHT FEES:

**€2 MILLION**

### HOUSING

#### ACCOMMODATION:

**€85,000 PER BED IN PBSA**

(EXCLUDING LAND PURCHASE COSTS)

Students are sleeping in cars, sofa-surfing, and living in poor conditions. Accommodation quantity and quality must be addressed in Budget 2020.

# ACCESS & INCLUSION

STUDENT TEACHER PLACEMENT:

**€50 MILLION**

STUDENT ASSISTANCE FUND:

**€3 MILLION**

# EQUALITY

BACK TO EDUCATION ALLOWANCE (BTEA):

**5% INCREASE IN BTEA RATE**

ASYLUM SEEKERS:

**€1 MILLION**

SOCIAL WELFARE U-26:

**€59.9 MILLION**

# HEALTH

**MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING:**

**€100,000 PER HEI**

[AVERAGE SALARY FOR 1.5 FULL TIME EQUIVALENT COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS]

▪ **€120,000 PER HEI**

[SUPPORT FOR THE ADOPTION AND SUPPORT OF A PEER LED SUPPORT PROGRAMME]

**€500,000**

[SUPPORT FOR A PILOT PROGRAMME OF 5 STUDENT SERVICE COORDINATORS]

**SEXUAL HEALTH FUNDING:**

**€90,000 PER HEI**

[STI HEALTHCARE NURSE IN CAMPUSES, INCLUDING ACCESS TO CONSULTANT AND FACILITIES]

▪ **€450,000**

[IN NEW SPENDING FOR PrEP PROVISION]

**€600,000**

[FUND TO ENABLE HEI'S TO ENACT CONSENT FRAMEWORK FOR CONSENT PROJECTS]

# ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

CARBON TAX:

**INCREASE THE RATE OF CARBON TAX**

LATTE LEVY:

**INTRODUCE A LEVY ON SINGLE USE CUPS AT €0.20 PER CUP**

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# GRANTS

Deontais

## GRANT INVESTMENT Deontas Infheistíochta

**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.

The number of grant holders has fallen significantly over the past number of years, from a height of 80,622 in 2015/16, to just 76,600 (provisionally) in 2018/19.

Student numbers have risen to a record high of 235,644 in 2017/18.

The DIT Campus Living Guide outlines conservative estimates for monthly expenditure, excluding fees, for a student living away from home at €1,222. Grants do not come close to covering such costs, even at the highest rate of €678 per month, with the cost of living in Ireland continuing to skyrocket, especially rents now at entirely unaffordable and unmanageable levels across the state. The Strategy for Funding Higher Education (2016) states that an additional €100 million over the next three to five years would be needed to fund student financial aid. Government 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). Thresholds must also be adjusted to allow middle income earners to be able to access the SUSI grant.

- Government spent €2 million less on SUSI in 2019 as increasing numbers find themselves ineligible for grant support. This represents a further cut in support.
- Rents have continuously risen in the last 27 quarters (almost 7 years) and from Q1 2018 to Q1 2019 by around 7% nationwide.
- Grants were cut by 4% in 2011, and again by 3% in 2012. The difference between 2011 and 2016 rates were on average €184.5 per person in receipt of the grant.
- From April 2011 until April 2019 the CSO Consumer Price Index indicates inflation of 4% on the cost of consumer goods and everyday household costs.

The graph below outlines the comparison from 2011 with current rates:

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/>

### ACTION NEEDED:

USI calls for a full and meaningful review of the SUSI Grant Scheme as part of the Government's scheduled review, taking account of the cost of living for students, with Government commitment to increased expenditure on grants arising from those findings.

**COSTING: €14.9 million**  
(for immediate pre-2011 restoration)

### RESPONSIBILITY:

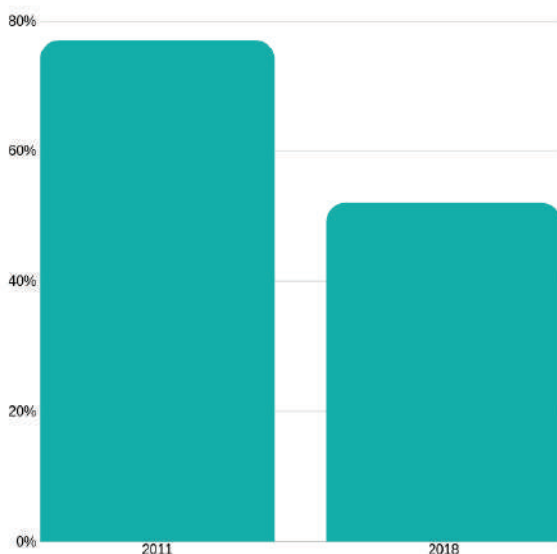
- The Department of Education and Skills



## GRANT ADJACENCY RATES Ráta Deontais Cóngarachta

**Proposal:** USI calls on 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.

**IN 2011, UNDER THE 24KM CRITERIA, 77 % OF THOSE ON THE MAINTENANCE GRANT WERE ON THE NON-ADJACENT RATE.**



**IN 2018, UNDER THE 45KM CRITERIA, 52% OF THOSE ON THE MAINTENANCE GRANT WERE ON THE NON-ADJACENT RATE.**

The intended purpose of the non-adjacent rate is to provide additional support to those students who may need to commute to college. The change from 24k to 45km has created difficulty for students who are already living far away from college and who are struggling with the high cost of college.

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.

In many rural areas, the frequency and accessibility of public and rural transport has not increased while the cost of transport has increased.

Due to high accommodation costs in cities and towns, more students are commuting to college, leading to increased potential for isolation, health issues, and drop-out.

- *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.*
- *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.*

**COSTING:  
€26 million**

**RESPONSIBILITY:**  
▪ The Department of Education and Skills

## POSTGRADUATE STUDENT GRANTS Deontais na hlarchéimí

**Proposal:** For Government to restore the Postgraduate SUSI Grant to pre-2012 levels at a minimum.

- *The average postgraduate qualification can range from €4,000 per annum up to €10,000.*
- *With a postgraduate labour supply of 21,562 projected for 2024/2025, there is a real need for SUSI provided grants to increase.*
- *The abolition of maintenance grants for postgraduates in 2012 may affect participation from students in lower socio-economic groups. (ESRI)*

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 legislative 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.”*

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

“ I spent one year saving and could not afford to apply for a master’s. I spent another year saving and still could not afford to apply for a master’s. ”

~ Niamh Cullen writing in 2016

**COSTING:**  
**€40 million**

**RESPONSIBILITY:**  
▪ Department of Education and Skills

# FEEES

Táillí

## STUDENT CONTRIBUTION CHARGE

## Táille Ranníocaíoch

**Proposal:** We are calling on the Government to reduce the annual Student Contribution Charge by a minimum of €500.



Ireland will have the highest fees in the EU after Brexit and continues to have some of the highest in the world. Currently, the Student Contribution Charge stands at €3,000, this charge more than doubled in a period of 6 years. The Government must take action to reduce the Student Contribution Charge to ensure current and future students can access higher education without overburdening themselves financially.

- *The Student Contribution Charge is the second highest expense for students and their families after accommodation for those living away from home and the highest expense for those who remain living at home. (DIT Cost of Living Guide)*
- *A reduction in the Student Contribution Charge is one way to help achieve the goals laid out in the HEA National Access Plan (2015).*
- *Higher Education is a public good and should be viewed as an investment rather than a cost. The return to the Irish Economy on Higher Education based on the 7 Universities alone amounts to €9.8bn (Delivering for Ireland An Impact Assessment of Irish Universities 2019).*
- *The Government should reduce the financial burden faced by students by reducing the Student Contribution Charge and replacing it with direct funding to Higher Education Institutions. Ireland has one of the lowest levels of expenditure in tertiary education as a percentage of GDP in the OECD area. It is difficult to understand how the Government will achieve its ambition to make Ireland's education and training system the best in Europe by 2026 when it contributes so little in comparison to other countries.*
- *According to the 2018 Spending Review, the average non-EU fees for studying in an IoT in 2017/2018 is €10,652 and for studying in a University it is €17,264. These are worrying costs considering the average cost of provision per student of €10,379 across the higher education system in Ireland. Based on the 18,468 non-EU students enrolled in HEI's in 2017/2018, the sector surplus based on the averages above amounts to over €132,000,000.*

“My family aren't eligible for SUSI.

*As a disabled student, I struggle with achieving what I am capable of in college. Working to make ends meet alongside the other aspects of my life has made college feel impossible at times. I have worked night shifts, and dragged myself into lectures the next morning. I have gone straight from exams centres to work. I have eaten one meal a day because money was tight that month. We need better, we need support to thrive at a point in our lives when we are supposed to be expanding our horizons.*”

~ Alex Coughlan, NUI Galway Student

**COSTING: €38 million**  
(for €500 reduction)

**RESPONSIBILITY:**

- The Department of Education and Skills
- The Department of Finance

## APPRENTICESHIP FEES

## Táille Phrintíseachta

**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.

**ONLY 1.5% OF  
APPRENTICES  
HAVE A  
DISCLOSED  
DISABILITY**



**ONLY 4% OF  
APPRENTICES  
ARE WOMEN**



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).*
- *It is highly unlikely that the Government will meet its stated Programme for Government target of 31,000 Apprentices by 2020.*
- *Ireland is not drawing down it's full portion of the Youth Employment Initiative Funds which can be utilised to cover apprentice fees, rather than placing the burden on the student.*
- *Germany abolished fees of €1,000 after significant backlash. The Irish Government continually references the German model of Apprenticeship. It should seek to replicate Germany in more ways than one, especially if Apprenticeships are a route to reducing the number of NEET in Ireland. **Barriers to education should be removed.***

**COSTING: €4.8 million**

**RESPONSIBILITY:**

- **The Department for Education and Skills**

## PGR STIPENDS

## Pá na hlarchéimí

**Proposal:** For the Government to introduce a national minimum wage for Postgraduate Research Students, with Irish Research Council stipends increasing from €16,000 to €19,000 per annum.

THE AVERAGE STIPEND  
FOR A PhD STUDENT IS  
**€16,416**

THE AVERAGE LIVING  
WAGE IN IRELAND IS  
**€24,444.22**



THE AVERAGE MINIMUM  
WAGE IN IRELAND IS  
**€19,874**

Postgraduate Researchers provide a massive contribution to Irish society, the economy and the institutions they are in. Ireland is competing internationally to attract the best talent, and the Irish State is failing to deliver a competitive stipend. Currently the stipend rates received by Postgraduate Research Students varies dramatically. Whilst the average remains at 16,000 euro, there is no national minimum, and therefore stipends of as little as 6,000 euro have been reported.

- *The cost of living continues to rise whilst stipends remain relatively stagnant.*
- *There are only on average 9,500 Postgraduate Researchers in the system annually. This student cohort in a recent TCD Mental Health study, registered the highest level of stress, anxiety and depression*
- *The living wage is a measure of income calculated to afford an employee a basic but socially acceptable standard of living. The living wage takes into account the costs of important aspects of daily life such as housing, transport, childcare and basic goods and services.*
- *PhD stipends need to provide a living remuneration, and should be transitioned toward a living wage in the coming years. This can be achieved incrementally.*

**COSTING: €3 million**

### RESPONSIBILITY:

- The Department for Education and Skills
- The Department of Business, 8 Enterprise and Innovation

## GAELTACHT FEES

## Na Táillí Gaeltachta

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

- *Primary teachers must self-fund two trips to the Gaeltacht at an average cost of €750 per trip*
- *Secondary teachers must provide evidence of two months Gaeltacht residence.*

The Gaeltacht placement is of great benefit for student teachers, providing the opportunity to immerse themselves in cultural and academic activities. The current required fee of €750 which primary school teachers must be paid twice creating a huge barrier to this crucial aspect of student teacher education. USI is calling on the Government to restore this grant as a matter of urgency in light of the current teacher supply crisis.

- *The USI Student Teacher Placement Report (2018) outlines that the Gaeltacht Fee is the biggest financial burden facing student teachers.*
- *This report also found that 42% of student teachers had considered dropping out due to financial pressures.*
- *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.*
- *The TUI report of 2018 found that there is an undersupply of teachers, particularly in the area of Irish at second level which was reported to be the most challenging subject area to fill in 2017 and in 2016.*
- *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.*
- *The 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 main tenance payments through SUSI. The additional €1 million added to the SAF provides no financial support for undergraduate students, long term funding is needed for all student teachers.*

“*Is mise Eoin, táim sa chéad bhliain in DCU. Táim tar éis dhá sheachtain a chaitheamh sa Ghaeltacht in Inis Mór. Chaith mé €750 ar an tréimhse foghlama riachtanach seo agus chaill mé amach ar €600 ó mo phost páirtaimseartha freisin. Caithfidh mé an rud céanna a dhéanamh sa tríú bliain”*

*“My name is Eoin, i’m in first year in DCU. I spent two weeks in the Gaeltacht in Inis Mór. I spent €750 on this mandatory learning placement and because of that I missed out on €600 from my part-time job. I will have to go back in third year to do the same thing.”*

*~ Eoin Crossen, DCU Student*

**COSTING: €2 million**

**RESPONSIBILITY:**

▪ **The Department for Education and Skills**

# HOUSING

Tithíocht



**Proposal:** Last year for Budget 2019, USI called for the for the government to provide capital grants specifically for HEI development of purpose built student accommodation (PBSA). We reiterate that call.

### SUPPLY

- *The Government's housing strategy, Rebuilding Ireland, identifies the important contribution that increased student accommodation provision can make to resolving the overall housing undersupply problem.*
- *The Government's National Student Accommodation Strategy (NSAS) outlined that, as of July 2019, there was an excess demand of purpose built student accommodation of 25,754 beds - a further increase in demand of 2,120 beds from the launch of the strategy in July 2017. (Department of Education & Skills, 2017)*

### COST

An element that NSAS does not address is the cost of these builds to the student, relying heavily on private developers to reach targets. Despite less restrictive planning guidelines for PBSA, costs have soared.

Not-for-profit vehicles such as the local authority, a dedicated state-backed student accommodation agency or a voluntary agency with support from the educational institution could mean that student accommodation could be provided for a slightly lower cost depending on the level of state subsidy. (Taft, 2019). Approved housing bodies (ABH) would also be in a position to provide affordable student accommodation if the Government developed a time-lined action plan to explore all options to move AHBs 'off-balance-sheet' and provide practical support to do so. (Clúid, 2019).

We have witnessed an increase in supply but the supply comes at a huge cost to the student, making these builds, and in turn, higher education itself, inaccessible. Educational inequality is worsening because those who are considering college are not pursuing their first choices, due to the cost of accommodation in urban areas.

*The creation of a not-for-profit vehicle such as the local authority, a dedicated state-backed student accommodation agency, approved housing body (ABH) or a voluntary agency with support from the educational institution - student accommodation could be provided for a slightly lower cost depending on the level of state subsidy.*

### SUPPLY & COST

USI continues to highlight serious concern over the rental costs of new PBSA builds coming onto the market, which have not been sufficiently addressed alongside the issue of supply. HEIs could build what ultimately would be public owned student accommodation on campuses - public land.

- *As it stands, only 19% of the total PBSA developments are publicly owned and 81% are privately owned developments. (McHugh, 2019)*
- *According to the HEA (2017), in terms of building new student accommodation, it is estimated that it costs approximately €85,000 per bed space (current values, excluding any costs associated with land purchase).*
- *A cost-rental basis for student accommodation would entail monthly costs (based on the HEI's estimate and a 30-year loan) of less than €400 per month. That is without any state subsidy or back-loading formula to maintain link between monthly cost and income rise over the years (which means the cost would be lower in the early years of use). Based on the HEI estimate of 25,000 unmet demand for student spaces by 2024, the initial outlay would be €2.2 billion or €425 million annually. This cost would be met out of rents/subsidies. (Taft, 2019)*

PBSA built 10 years ago is now changing use to non-student accommodation. Government must remove the guideline that developers are only required to rent to students in PBSA for ten years from the date the property is first let to students, as stated in the 'Guidelines on Residential Developments for 3rd Level Students.'

*"Safeguards are required to ensure that student accommodation is not used as permanent residential accommodation" (Murphy, 2019)*

## BORROWING FRAMEWORKS

- *With no borrowing framework for the Institutes of Technology it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the majority of HEIs to finance PBSA. (HEA, 2017)*
- *The majority of PBSA complexes in public ownership are owned by the seven universities. The level of income generated by the university sector from student accommodation is due to increase from €51 million in 2014 - to €90 million in 2019 - to just under €120 million in 2024 which could be invested back into more student accommodation or the institution itself. (HEA, 2017)*

**COSTING: €85,000**  
per bed (excluding the cost of land purchase)

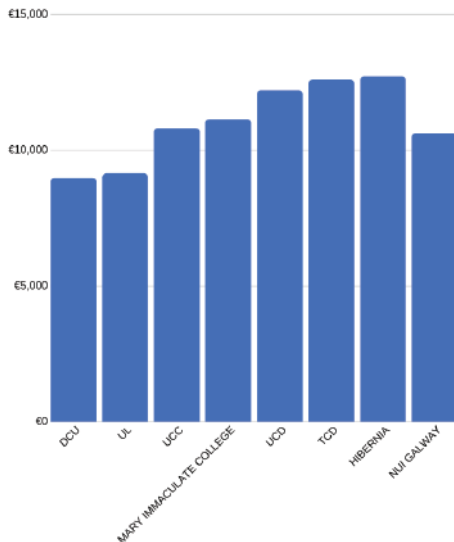
## RESPONSIBILITY:

- **The Department of Education and Skills**

# ACCESS & INCLUSION

Cuimsiú

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



“ I never realised how elitist and unaccessible teaching has become. When you're going into schools you meet children from all different backgrounds, but they don't always have someone from their own area to look up to. I think I saw the difference between those who have money and those who don't when I was on placement. The student teachers without money are always exhausted, under huge pressure financially and this has an impact on their work. I have heard of people dropping out due to how expensive my course is. ”

~ Nikita Ní Raifeartaigh, St Angela's College

Student teachers today face the second highest fees in Europe at undergraduate level at €3,000. The PME has increased to two years with fees averaging at €9,000. Students then complete unpaid placements which further burden them with costs such as travel, resources, accommodation. These students then face a two tier pay system upon graduation. USI is calling on the Government to end pay inequality and to support student teachers.

- The USI Student Teacher Placement Report found that 42% of student teachers have considered dropping out due to financial pressures.
- The Teaching Council has determined that 25% (30 weeks) of student time over the four years of undergraduate programmes and 40% (24 weeks) of student time over the two years of postgraduate programmes should be allocated to school placement.
- 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.
- 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.
- Teachers appointed before 1 January 2011 start at €32,009 a year. For teachers appointed between 1 January 2011 and February 2012, the starting salary is €28,888.

## COSTING: €50 million

## RESPONSIBILITY:

- The Department for Education and Skills
- The Department of Finance

**Proposal:** Budget 2020 should significantly increase the financial support allocated to the SAF and address the shortfall in funding to this student-centred resource.



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 for SUSI by marginal amounts. Students who are in receipt of a SUSI grant and those who are not eligible for grants can all face financial difficulty and the SAF is open to all undergraduate students, full-time and part-time who are struggling to make ends meet. However, the investment from government to this fund was cut from €11m in 2012 and still has not been restored to adequately meet the needs of students.

Students are currently paying the 2nd highest fees in Europe, the cost of living continues to soar year on year and rent prices are forever increasing. This along with unforeseen expenditures requires investment from government to the SAF in Budget 2020 in order to ensure student success.

- In 2018, the initial allocation for SAF was €9.1m with €1m ring-fenced specifically for part-time students from the target groups in the National Access Plan to help deliver the goals outlined within that plan, as was the case in 2017 for ring-fenced funding
- In 2019, a further €1m was ring-fenced for Professional Masters in Education bringing the total fund to €10.1m
- Although we welcome funding for part-time students and PME students, the majority of students who require access to the fund are full-time undergraduates and the fund is not large enough to support these students

**COSTING: €3 million**

**RESPONSIBILITY:**

- The Department for Education and Skills

# EQUALITY

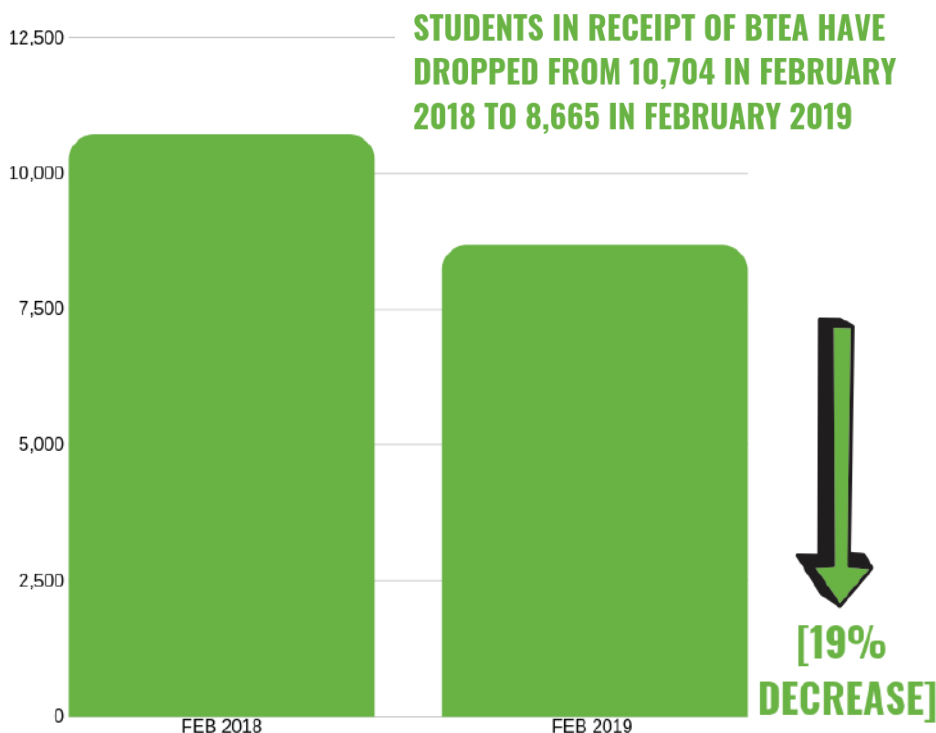
Comhionannas

## BACK TO EDUCATION ALLOWANCE (BTEA)

Liúntas chun Filleadh ar an Oideachas

**Proposal:** An increase of 5% to all BTEA payments and reform to the BTEA postgraduate approved courses.

USI are calling on the Government to increase BTEA payments by 5% as the current rates are insufficient to cover costs associated with attending higher education. We are also calling on the Government to remove the restrictions for jobseekers who already hold a third level qualification that wish to apply for BTEA to undertake further study and to remove restrictions for jobseekers who wish to undertake post-graduate education other than Higher Diploma or Professional Masters in Education.



- The current BTEA weekly rate for someone over 26 is equal to the previous social protection payment that qualified the individual for participation in the scheme. This does not take into consideration the additional costs associated with attending higher education such as materials, transport, accommodation etc.
- Anyone under the age of 26 who is in receipt of the reduced age-related Jobseeker's Allowance payment, the personal maximum weekly rate is €204. Again, this does not cover the costs associated with attending higher education and places great strain upon individuals wishing to obtain a third level qualification.

- The purpose of BTEA is to provide a second chance at education and improve individuals prospects of employment. In the ever changing world of work, we believe it is important that jobseekers can undertake further study at third level without restrictions based on previous third level qualifications. We believe the current restrictions act as a barrier to achieve the objectives of BTEA.
- We believe it is important to remove the restrictions for jobseekers who wish to undertake a post graduate course to encourage further engagement in postgraduate education. Many employers look favourably upon students who have achieved a postgraduate qualification however, many of those in receipt of BTEA or eligible for BTEA are unable to apply for postgraduate courses in their field.

### ACTION NEEDED:

Reform of eligibility criteria and to the reassessment criteria based on summer work period and clear information campaign on same.

**COSTING:**  
Increase the rate of BTEA by 5% to €8,925 per student.

### RESPONSIBILITY:

- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

## ASYLUM SEEKERS

## Iarrthóir Tearmainn

**Proposal:** USI calls on the government to make higher education more accessible for asylum seekers.

As it stands currently, asylum seekers are considered international students when applying for higher education. This means that the fees that asylum seekers pay are anywhere between €10,000 - €20,000 per year at the undergraduate level.

**€10,000 - €20,000**

FOR STUDENT FEES IS AN UNAFFORDABLE PRICE FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES. EDUCATION MUST BE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

This financial barrier has stopped asylum seekers from entering higher education. Very often asylum seeker children who finish secondary school are then unable to continue on to higher education because of the high international student fees.

- Adults in Direct Provision receive €38.80 per week and children receive just €29.80
- The 2019 Eurydice Report "Integrating Asylum Seekers and Refugees into Higher Education in Europe: National Policies and Measures", noted that top level steering documents covering higher education do not refer explicitly to asylum seekers and/or refugees. The Report also points out that Portugal classifies asylum seekers as domestic students.
- The Pilot Student Support Scheme has been in place since 2015. USI welcomes the recent changes announced by the Department to remove the requirement of five years education in Ireland, bringing it in line with SUSI requirements. However, significant barriers to this scheme remain.
- The 1916 Bursary is available to refugees but they are only considered as one part of seven target groups, including lone parents, mature students, Irish travellers, and students with disabilities.
- The SUSI Grant is available to refugees but there are again issues with this support; you must have been resident in Ireland for 3 of the past 5 years.

“I applied to each scholarship in this country for asylum seeker students [without success]. I’ve tried so hard, I have studied so hard. I used to get €21.60 allowance which has increased recently but saving that money I used to go to revision days which costs anywhere from €20 - €80 plus traveling. I was one of the highest scoring students on agriculture science leaving cert practical Exam.”

~ Altamash Shaikh (19), living in Mosney Direct Provision Centre

### ACTION NEEDED:

Develop a national policy on asylum seeker and refugee access and integration into further and higher education.

### LEGISLATIVE CHANGE:

A change to consider asylum seekers and refugees as domestic students when applying for college.

## COSTING: €1 million

- Initial investment in 50 scholarships at approximately €20,000 per student to cover fee waivers, maintenance, and accommodation.

## RESPONSIBILITY:

▪ Department of Education and Skills; Department of Justice and Equality



## SOCIAL WELFARE U-26

## Leas Sóisialta faoi- 26

**Proposal:** USI calls on the government to restore the full adult rate to young people under 26 years on Jobseekers Allowance.

The decision to reduce social welfare for those under 26 has had a drastic and negative affect on young graduates who cannot find employment in their particular field. Students are concerned that once they finish their degree, they will not be able to find employment and the reduced Jobseekers Allowance does not support them enough.

The table below shows the differences in Jobseekers Allowance by age as well as showing minimal increases in Jobseekers Allowance over the past three years.

	AGED 26 AND OVER			AGED 25			AGED 18 - 24		
YEAR	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
MAX PERSONAL RATE €	193	198	203	147.80	152.80	157.80	102.70	107.70	112.70

- The Youth Unemployment rate in January 2019 was 13.9% which is more than double the national average of 5.7%.
- The Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness has identified the current policy as disadvantaging young people and contributing to youth homelessness. The Coalition also noted that there had been an 82% increase in the number of 18 to 24 year-olds homeless since 2014.
- As of the 27th of April there were 17,310 persons under the age of 26 years in receipt of a Jobseeker's Allowance payment. 4,271 of these young people were receiving Jobseekers allowance for more than 12 months.
- The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Research in its 2018 Report noted that the Jobseekers Allowance Rate for those under 25 is not adequate.

"The cost of an MESL for an unemployed young adult living in the parental family home (and qualifying for a full medical card) is €149 per week. The reduced rate of JA for adults under 25 (€107.70) continues to fall short of providing an MESL, despite the increase made this year, and an individual in this situation would require significant support from their family in order to afford an MESL."

**COSTING: €59.87 million**

**RESPONSIBILITY:**

▪ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

# HEALTH

Sláinte

## MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING Maoiniú le haghaidh Seirbhísí Meabhairshláinte

**Proposal:** For Government to commit to a nationwide investment in mental health services for students in third-level education.

**THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES HAS RISEN AT A RATE OF 127% SINCE 2014**



**75% OF ADULTS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS FIRST EXPERIENCE SYMPTOMS BEFORE THE AGE OF 25**



**77% OF STUDENTS WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO LOOK AFTER A FRIEND**

Levels of mental illness, mental distress and low wellbeing among students in higher education is increasing (IPPR 2017). 75% of adults with mental illness first experience symptoms before the age of 25, with peak onset from 18-25 (Kessler and Wang 2008). Students with mental health difficulties are more vulnerable to withdrawal than any other category of student with disability. However, once supported appropriately they are more successful in higher education (Twomey et al. 2010).

- *Students value the free student counselling services on campus, especially those in rural areas with no accessible alternative. Consideration should be made for cost-effective approaches to reduce the treatment gap and support students while on the waiting list, such as group psychotherapy or internet-based interventions.*
- *HEIs have been enacting the 'Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs' report, published by the DES. With increased awareness of consent on campuses, it is expected that there will be a higher rate of students disclosing incidents of sexual violence. There will need to be increased support for counselling services to deal with this increased demand.*
- *Peer support programmes should be supported to expand. Students themselves have been shown to play a key role in informally supporting each other and discussing their difficulties, often in peer mentoring programmes. Peer support is widely recognised as one of the most cherished forms of support for young people with mental health difficulties.*
- *Pilot programme: TCD has introduced a Student Services Coordinator that coordinates services designed to minimise the impact of mental illness on students who have complex mental health difficulties through effective case management and the coordination of care between campus and community resources. There should be a pilot programme to see the feasibility of having a case coordinator on every campus to deal with students who have complex mental health difficulties.*

“Going to see a counselor shouldn't make someone feel guilty for taking a place on the waiting list; it should be seen as normal as taking a place on a medical doctor's waiting list. Without increased supports, this shame and guilt will never shake. We need funding for an education which takes the realities of this generation into account. We need more counselors that will be readily available to those that are feeling overwhelmed, as well as those in a manic state. We need every form of mental ill-health to be respected equally.”

~ Sorcha Murphy (DCUSU, Chair of Mental Health Soc)

### COSTING:

- €100,000 per HEI - average salary for 1.5 Full Time Equivalent Counselling Psychologists (HSE, 2019)
- €120,000 per HEI - Support for the adoption and support of a peer lead support programme
- €500,000 - Support for a pilot programme of 5 Student Service Coordinators

### RESPONSIBILITY:

- Department of Education and Skills;
- Department of Health; Health Service Executive (HSE) 21

## SEXUAL HEALTH

## Sláinte Ghnéis

**Proposal:** Building on commitments to providing consent education, Government must invest in sexual health services for students in Ireland.

- Young people (aged 15-24 years) are most affected by STIs (HPSC, 2018)
- 49% of chlamydia cases (reported cases 7.2% increase from 2017) (HPSC, 2018)
- PrEP has been shown that not only is it cost-effective, but it is cost saving. (HIQA, 2019)
- On consent, only 3 per cent reported experiencing these incidents to the Gardaí.
- When asked for explanations of why they did not report matters to the Gardaí, the two most frequent responses were (i) that they did not believe the incident was serious enough to report (57 per cent); and (ii) that they did not think that what happened was a crime (44 per cent) (USI, 2013)

It is paramount that we provide support for students to improve their sexual health and wellbeing. Government supported initiatives and frameworks providing for better consent education, protection from sexual assault, affordable access to abortion care, STI checks and treatment of contracted STIs is crucial to this.

“We need to lift the cloud of shame off of discussions of sexual health.

We need STI testing to be accessible and affordable. Our problem with sexual health isn't that we don't have the answers - it's that we're lacking supports, and the resources we do have are inaccessible.”

~ Dean O'Reilly (DCUSU, LGBTA Society Committee)

- The best way to end stigma for a high risk group like students (HPSC, 2018) is with a visible, well-resourced, on-campus STI clinic catering to campus culture. Most colleges are too far from affordable STI clinics, while there have been noted outbreaks of STIs among students rurally.
- PrEP medication is taken by HIV-negative people to reduce the chance of getting HIV. By investing in PrEP now it “is less costly, and more effective... than not providing PrEP” (HIQA, 2019) Under the current system, PrEP is inaccessible to students.
- With increased funding to student health centres for STI clinic provision, they could provide STI checks, treatment and PrEP medication to students.
- In April 2019, the DES published the ‘Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs’ Consent Framework, which HEIs have been enacting with the aid of a €400,000 fund. However, HEIs need more support to fully realise the Consent Framework, to protect and educate their students.

“It is imperative that all students have access to an equitable and accessible student health service. Providing this service is dependent on funding, and appropriate personnel to deliver the service. Implementation will be straightforward as services can be delivered in tandem with existing student health services which will ensure maximum service user engagement, efficiency and effective service delivery. In the absence of a service, students regularly present inappropriately to the acute care system, predominantly the local out of hours GP service, with concerns relating to sexual health.”

~ Laura Tully, Irish Student Health Association

## COSTING:

€90,000 per HEI - STI Healthcare nurse in campuses,  
€450,000 in new spending for PrEP provision  
€600,000 - Fund to enable HEIs to enact Consent Framework for consent projects

## RESPONSIBILITY:

- Department of Education and Skills;
- Department of Health; Health Service Executive (HSE)

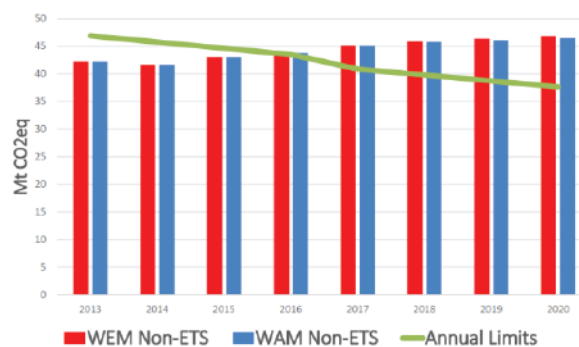
# ENVIRONMENT

Timpeallacht

**Proposal:** USI calls upon the Government to further increase the rate of Carbon Tax in Budget 2020 as a means not just to generate revenue, but to change consumer behaviour in order to move away from a dependence on fossil fuels and therefore reducing emissions.

*The “Green Wave” witnessed in the results of the 2019 Local and European elections has sent a clear message to the Government that the people of Ireland want action on climate change.*

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland is required to deliver a 20% reduction in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. It is projected that Ireland will have only made a 0%-1% reduction by 2020.



(Ireland's 2018 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections, 2018 Projections Non ETS - Trajectory to 2020)

Investigating all possible and fair opportunities to increase the way to reduce carbon emissions, thus avoiding future costly penalties from the EU for not meeting targets, and would demonstrate our country's commitment to progressive sustainability and climate change action.

The current rate of carbon tax is set at €20 per tonne and in 2017 the total revenue generated was €419.6million, this is currently going straight into the general exchequer pot. We call on the Government to increase the tax to €30 per tonne in Budget 2020 and incrementally increase the tax to €80 per tonne in subsequent budgets until 2030.

- *The tax needs to be increased with the view that Carbon Tax should be used not only to generate revenue also to change behaviour. However, the Fee and Dividend model which would see all the tax returned to households, needs to ensure that students are not negatively impacted due to their living situation.*
- *Increasing Carbon Tax with the current method will have a significant negative impact those from lower socio-economic and disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as certain student cohorts such as those who use private transport to travel to and from their education due to lack of a suitable/frequent public transport system and students who are living in substandard accommodation due to the housing crisis.*
- *Carbon Taxes should operate in parallel to Government financing third level institutions to decarbonise and move towards self-sufficient energy sources.*

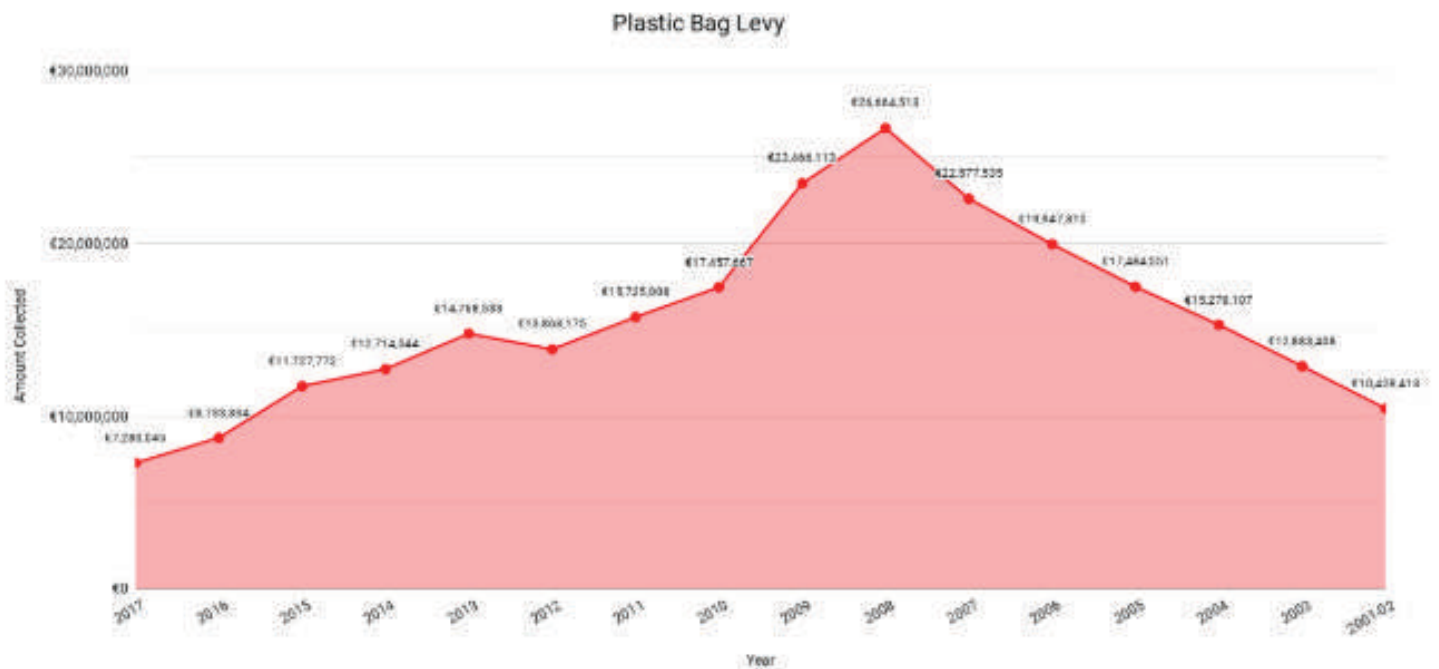
## RESPONSIBILITY:

- Department of Finance
- Department of Communications, Climate Change & Environment

**Proposal:** USI calls upon the government to reconsider the introduction of a levy on single use cups at €0.20 per cup.

USI calls upon the government to reconsider the introduction of a Levy on single use cups, recognising that Ireland must do more to play its part in saving our planet. In 2002 the Government introduced a 0.15c levy on plastic bags at points of sale. This was an environmental levy to reduce the consumption of plastic bags and the adverse effects they were having on Ireland's landscape.

The levy was later increased to 0.22c from July 2007. Since its implementation in 2002 it has generated €250 million in revenue, which has been used for many environmental projects. The introduction of the plastic bag levy has successfully influenced consumer behaviour, this can be seen by the decrease in revenue generated by the levy. (Approx €19 million decrease in revenue from 2007 to 2017)



Approximately two million single use cups are being disposed of each day in Ireland. These are non-recyclable due to the plastic film lining the inside cup. A levy, such as the introduction of the successful plastic bag levy in 2002, would incentivise people to use reusable cups thus reducing the number of single use cups being disposed of to landfills each day and assist the battle for waste reduction.

**REVENUE GENERATION: €40 million p/a**  
[200 million cups x €0.20]

**RESPONSIBILITY:**  
▪ Department of Communications, Climate Change & Environment

# ABOUT USI

## Cur Síos ar Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

*The Union of Students in Ireland (Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn) is the national representative body for third-level Students' Unions in Ireland. Founded in 1959, USI now represents more than 374,000 students in Further and Higher Education Colleges across the island of Ireland. The goal of USI is to work for the rights of students and a fair and equal post-secondary education system in Ireland.*

*USI is a full member of the European Students' Union (ESU) which represents students from 46 National*

*Students' Unions in 39 countries, and a member of Eurodoc, the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers.*

## AUTHORSHIP

### Údarthacht

#### **Compiled and edited by:**

Oisín Hassan, USI Deputy President/VP Academic Affairs

#### **Authors and contributors:**

Síona Cahill, USI President

Lorna Fitzpatrick, USI VP Southern Region/President-Elect

Oisín Hassan, USI Deputy President/VP Academic Affairs

Damien McClean, USI VP Welfare

Michelle Byrne, USI VP Campaigns

Aisling Cusack, USI VP Equality & Citizenship

Andrew Forde, USI VP Postgraduate Affairs

Aoife Ní Dhéisigh, USI Leas Uachtarán don Ghaeilge

Barry Clohessy, USI VP Border, Midlands and Western Region

Colm O'Halloran, USI VP Dublin Region

Aoife Price, USI Mental Health Project Manager

Darcy Lonergan, USI Energy & Sustainability Manager

Mariaam Bhatti, USI Student Housing Project Executive

#### **With thanks to:**

Alex Coughlan, NUIG

Eoin Crossen, DCU

Nikita Ní Raifeartaigh, StACS

Altamash Shaikh, Mosney Direct Provision Centre

Sorcha Murphy, DCU

Dean O'Reilly, DCU

#### **Designed by:**

Aoife Duff, USI PR and Communications Manager

*All queries to [pr@usi.ie](mailto:pr@usi.ie)*



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