



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

A Vision for post-bailout Ireland

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A vision for post-bailout Ireland

by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

Ireland is a young country, but too often we seem to be stuck in old ways of thinking. To be sure, the mistakes of the last generation of political leaders could have dealt serious damage to the prospects of today's youth – but with political will and the application of all our energies it doesn't have to be so.

Students are committed to economic growth, job creation and the formation of a great society whose values ensure the nation is flexible and capable enough to avoid a return to the recession from which it has just emerged. The Ireland of tomorrow must be built on visionary thinking today.

Overall, our vision is of citizens committed to a fair, prosperous and optimistic society, where lasting and sustainable economic development occurs alongside a commitment to social equity.

This document lays out plainly the changes the Students of Ireland would like to see in the post-bailout era.

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Commit to properly fund Higher Education.

In austerity Ireland the decision was taken that we could not afford to adequately fund Higher Education. We must now in a post-bailout environment see that we cannot afford not to.

Resources allocated to Higher Education are not merely public spending, but public investment with a historically guaranteed return. The long-term benefits to the people of Ireland and our economy of continuing to prioritise Higher Education are unquestionable. We must end the short-termism of the past and see that Ireland's real competitive advantage lies in producing the highly-skilled, highly-qualified graduates which must form the foundation of our future workforce.

Student loans and deferred payment schemes are certainly not the answer. Students elsewhere have seen the consequences of crippling student debt, whilst families and students from poorer backgrounds tend to be much more debt averse.

Fairness, growth in our skill-based economy and equity of access to Higher Education can and will only be achieved through proper State investment, and a system that is free at the point of entry with the provision of fair and sufficient grants.

*USI is developing policy on Third-Level Funding with NERI (Nevin Economic Research Institute). This is scheduled for launch on the 31st of March 2014.

Take action to address the Youth Unemployment Crisis.

Ireland's levels of youth unemployment are unacceptably high, currently at almost 30%. This is made worse by the mass emigration of young people from Ireland in recent years.

The decision to commit €14m of funding to the Youth Guarantee scheme in the recent Budget, whilst welcome, is at best inadequate and at worst measly and derogatory, given the scale of the crisis.

The National Youth Council of Ireland estimates that the total investment required is some €273m.

It is now time for decisive action to invest in Ireland's youth, through firm investment and policy across all relevant Departments- Social Protection, Education, and Jobs & Enterprise.

We must see this not just as a single element of our wider economic woes, but the single biggest threat to our future prosperity. The 'brain drain' of our best and brightest cannot be allowed to continue.

*USI has released a collaborative policy paper with ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions) and ISSU (Irish Secondary School Students' Union), ['Locked Out? - Investing In A Future For Youth'](#), on positive solutions to address the crisis currently facing young people in Ireland.

Reform the political system for Ireland's future.

The recent decision to retain *Seanad Eireann*, was welcomed by USI. Along with the affirmation of *an Seanad* was a clear message and mandate to reform the whole Oireachtas.

The establishment of the Economic Management Council has led to a worrying centralisation of decision-making, and dilution of democracy. This 'war Cabinet' should be dissolved and it's time to move towards a more open, consultative and participative Parliamentary system.

The Whip System, Executive control over the membership of Dáil Committees, and the disbanding of the EMC should all be considered as part of this process. Only then can we start to move past the turgor of political apathy which has dogged this country. If Ireland is to be a player in a new economic and social paradigm, it needs a parliament fit to meet those needs.

USI supports votes at 16.

Ireland's diaspora has a part to play in the economic and social growth of Ireland. USI supports the extension of the right to vote to the worldwide Irish community.

*USI have released a policy document containing our proposals for Political Reform, ['Free Our Voice- Politics For the People'](#).

Guarantee a day's pay for a day's work

During the recession, we experienced a gradual but definite erosion of workers' pay and conditions. The USI believes a 'living wage' should be introduced in order to ensure a fair standard of living for all workers, and the end of zero hour contracts.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice recently published research on the Minimum Essential Standard of Living Expenditure. The call for a living wage has also been recently backed by the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI).

The current embargo on public sector recruitment should come to an end. Whilst it may cut costs in the short term, it threatens to artificially stymie the development of the public services Ireland needs in its recovery phase.

The 'JobBridge' scheme, now extended to a maximum of 18 months and allied to the recent disgraceful cuts in the dole for under 26's, has led to some young people being forced to work 40-hour weeks for less than €4 per hour under the guise of an internship.

USI believes there needs to be radical reform of all internship programmes, with proper monitoring, oversight and regulation of such schemes put in place. We also believe that the JobBridge scheme is beyond repair, and should be phased out in the coming years.

Budget for equality:

Equality Budgeting is an approach to economic policy-making that places equality at the centre of decisions concerning public income and expenditure.

USI believe that the pain imposed on the most vulnerable in recent years could have been mitigated through an approach focused on equality budgeting.

Post-Bailout, we implore the Government to join the more than 60 countries who have already implemented or are working towards a system of Equality Budgeting.

Legislate for collective bargaining in all industries

Every worker should have the option to join and be represented by a trade union without victimisation.

Ireland's failure to enact collective bargaining legislation is a violation of the Right to Freedom and the Right to Organise, and the absence of this legislation has been condemned by the United Nations' Human Rights Council.

Many students and young people, forced into precarious employment, part-time work and unpaid internships, are unaware of their rights as workers and are therefore likely to be exploited.

The introduction of this legislation would undoubtedly lead to better working conditions for workers in this country.

Relieve mortgage debt on hard-pressed families

The enormous strain and anxiety being placed on families across the country in recent years is being worsened by the enormous amounts of personal and mortgage debt in existence.

Families unable to meet mortgage repayments due to business closures, redundancies and the wider impacts of the economic crisis, must be supported by Government.

Measures should be introduced to prevent home repossessions and ease the burden on these families, and greater flexibility needs to be shown by lenders in dealing with these situations.

Scrap the waste in public spending

The country's economic crash was in many ways categorised by the considerable waste of public monies, brought about by a culture of greed and excess.

USI believes that an independent taxpayer lobby group should be established in Ireland which would act in the best interests of the general taxpayer, and seek to ensure the prudent and efficient spending of public money.

Several such organisations exist in other countries. This lobby group should also have representation on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

Tackle the cost of living by controlling rent and improving social housing

USI wholeheartedly supports and endorse recent calls by housing charity Threshold for Government action on the increasing cost of rental accommodation.

There is a rapidly escalating student accommodation crisis, particularly in Dublin and the wider commuter belt areas, with declining availability being met with stark increases in the cost of renting a property.

The time is right to legislate to curb the cost of rental prices in the face of this crisis, by linking any increases to the cost of living and customer price indexes.

A charge on unjustified unoccupied buildings should be considered, with proceeds diverted to social housing – additionally, a new principle that unoccupied buildings could be turned over to social housing providers and housing associations should be considered.

Invest in Community Mental Health services

The wider impacts of the recession have seen an increase in people, particularly young people, experiencing difficulties with their mental health. The strain, anxiety and uncertainty associated with financial difficulties in their personal and family lives have undoubtedly been a contributing factor in this.

Multidisciplinary community-based mental health services are vital in dealing with these types of issues and ensuring that adequate supports are available for those who need them.

In Budget 2015, the full €35m committed for investment in community mental health services should be allocated, along with the €15m balance of the underspend in Budget 2014, to a total of a €50m investment in these essential services.