



# PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2017

#EducationIs



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



# FOREWORD

A Chara,

Education is a public service and serves the public good. Across the world, there are examples- of how meaningful public investment in third-level education can contribute to a broad range of objectives. Properly funded third-level education is the foundation of job creation, social equality, and a thriving economy.

However, there now exists a consensus - both within the sector and without - that higher education in Ireland is under threat. It is under threat because its funding is insufficient, and it is under threat because of the excessive and escalating cost of a family sending their child to college.

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.

As you will no doubt be aware, a key concern of hundreds of thousands of students and their families is the ever-rising cost of third-level education. Dramatic increases in accommodation costs, a persistent shortage in appropriate part-time work, and the burden of €3,000 fees contribute to a significant annual cost of around €11,000 to attend third-level. Against a backdrop of drastically reduced family incomes, this arrangement is not sustainable. Further, there has been no increase in the sufficiency of core student supports while these costs have risen. Students and families are actively and demonstrably struggling to make ends meet.

These concerns are reflected in our recommendations for Budget 2017. The accessibility and quality of third-level education are topical and urgent concerns; if allowed to continue, the current arrangements will deliver a two-tier and under-performing system. This serves no one's interest.

We encourage you to meet local Students' Unions when they reach out for meetings over the coming weeks as they represent a significant portion of people in your constituency.

With pride,



*Annie Hoey*

Annie Hoey  
President 2016/2017  
Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

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## ABOUT USI

USI is the national representative body for the 354,000 students in third level education on the Island of Ireland. We are a membership organisation – our members are our affiliated Students' Unions around Ireland, North and South. USI Officerboard are elected by it's membership at its annual Congress and support students in a full-time capacity.

# CORE ASKS

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

**Costing:** €34m per €500 reduction

**Proposal:** For the Government to invest €140m into the higher education sector

**Costing:** €140m

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

**Costing:** €1m

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

**Costing:** €3m to remove apprenticeship college fees annually

**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

**Costing:** €5m and €2.5m

**Proposal:** For the Government to reverse cuts to student grants made in Budget 2011 and Budget 2012.

**Costing:** €12.3m

**Proposal:** For the Government to reinstate the 2011 Adjacency Rates

**Costing:** €27 million

**Proposal:** For the Government to reinstate Postgraduate Grants

**Costing:** €53 million

**Proposal:** For the Government to begin phased restoration to 2012 rates of SAF to reflect the real costs attached to participation in Higher Level Education in Ireland.

**Costing:** 2016 Budget: + €1m to €8m; 2017 Budget: + €1m to €9m; 2018 Budget: + €1m to €10m; 2019 Budget: + €1m to €11m

**Proposal:** For the Government to ring-fence funding of €37.5m annually and to put emphasis on local 24/7 crisis intervention services.

**Costing:** €37.5m

**Proposal:** For the Government to invest in third-level mental health counselling

**Costing:** €5m ring-fenced for student counselling and supports per annum

**Proposal:** For the Government to set the rate for all people under the age 26 to currently on reduced Jobseekers rates should have their payments set at the minimum adult rate of €188 per week.

**Costing:** €149m

# THIRD-LEVEL FUNDING AND FEES

**Subject:** Third-Level Registration Fee

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

**Rationale:** Budget 2017 can reduce the financial burden on families until the deliberation of the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills. The Student Contribution charge jumped from €1,500 to €2,000 and continued to increase in increments of €250 each year until it reached its highest point at €3000 in 2015. A decrease would alleviate the pressure on the payment of fees that have doubled over a period of six years.

The *DIT Campus Life Cost of Living Guide* (2015) estimates the cost of living while studying at third-level is €11,000 a year. The sum is made up of many different costs like the Student Contribution charge which is second only to rent; and it is the one payable cost that is directly affected by the budget. A reduced cost of third-level will have positive consequences for student retention, participation and mental health, as well as raising standards of student living and reducing over-dependence on part-time employment. (Why Students Leave, p. 47.). USI proposes that the government further subsidise higher education institutions by a minimum of €34m in order to deliver a reduction in the Student Contribution of at least €500. (Written Answers, 20 January 2016).

€34m per €500 reduction

**Costing:**

Department of Education and Skills

**Responsibility:**

### **Additional Investment into Higher Education**

**Subject:**

For the Government to invest €140m into the higher education sector

**Proposal:**

*Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education* (2016) outlines a number of options for the funding of higher education. The report states the need for an increase in core funding directed towards “an improvement in student:staff ratios, better engagement with students, and improved support services for teachers and students [...which] will underpin the quality of teaching and learning, the relevance of graduates’ competences and abilities and improve completion rates.” (Investing in National Ambition, p. 7)

While the full implementation of the preferred model for funding higher education will not be decided for some considerable time there is no reason to postpone overdue and necessary investment in those areas of the sector which have been badly affected by diminishing resources over the past seven years. The report also notes that “the current system of income supports goes some way to meeting these costs, but is not sufficient. Some students are having to rely excessively on part time work, commute long distances or turn to commercial lenders.” USI research shows 58% of students use extreme budgeting tactics, such as missing meals, in order to meet the costs of education (Irish Independent, 21 June 2016). Further research into student dropout shows that financial issues are a significant trigger for withdrawal from attending third-level (Why Students Leave, p. 47). The highest available rate of maintenance grant, available only in special circumstances and at a non-adjacent rate, contributes to a maximum of 54% of the annual cost of participation in third-level. USI proposes a phased introduction of the required costs (€600m in core funding and €100m in student support funding) between Budget 2017 and Budget 2022. As such, we propose a €120m increase in core funding to higher education and a €20m increase in funding for student supports.

€140m

**Costing:**

Department of Education and Skills

**Responsibility:**



**Subject:** Gaeltacht Placement Fees

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

**Rationale:** Students starting their programme of initial primary teacher education since the 2012/13 academic year have been required to self-fund fees relating to three weeks of mandatory Gaeltacht placement. These costs had previously been covered by a €637 state grant for the three-week placements. With roughly 1350 participants, the overall cost of the grant was in the region of €860,000 per annum. (Written Answers, 16 July 2013).

In May 2012, a Gaeltacht Placement Working Group report to the Teaching Council warned that the withdrawal of government funding for student teacher placement was "a matter of serious concern and may deter persons from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds from enrolling on programmes of initial teacher education" (Report of the Gaeltacht Placement Working Group to the Teaching Council, p. 3). In September 2014 the Minister for Education acknowledged "that the funding of the Gaeltacht Placement is a significant cost to students and their families" (Written Answers, 25 September 2014) and estimated the cost of restoring the grant for the extended four-week placement at €1 million.

Students engaged in programmes of initial teacher education have between 18 and 30 contact hours per week, with additional responsibilities in mandatory placement periods and lesson plan preparation. The very nature of the programmes restrict access to consistent employment. Before Gaeltacht placement costs, students face annual costs of attending college of up to €11,000. (DIT Campus Life, 2016). A previous Minister for Education & Skills (Written Answers, 1 July 2014) had 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 proposes the reinstatement of the state grant to cover all four weeks of mandatory placement for PME students.

**Costing:** €1m

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Subject:** Apprenticeship Fees

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

**Rationale:** The decision taken in Budget 2014 to impose a new pro-rata Student Contribution fee and for SOLAS to cease making payment to the Institutes of Technology of 70% of the fee is a burden on student apprentices. The decision should be reversed in order to foster the growth of apprenticeships and reach targets set out by the Department of Education and Skills (Priority Questions, 19 May 2016). Institutes of Technology levied the student contribution in respect of apprentices since 2004, with FÁS and SOLAS paying up to 70% of the contribution and apprentices paying the remainder (Dáil Éireann Written Answers Nos. 134-145, 25 May 2016) before the introduction of the new pro-rata Student Contribution fee of €1,000 per annum.

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 47 proposals and will target over 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy and in every region in Ireland. Annual registrations increased by 40% from 2013 to 2014 with a further increase of 17% in 2015 bringing to the total number of apprentices to 3,153 (Dáil Written Answers, 19 July 2016) and is forecasted to grow to 5,089 by 2018 (Priority Questions, 19 May 2016).

The publication of the *Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland* (p. 90) discussed that “many countries are newly adopting apprenticeship systems based on dual modes of learning, combining workplace learning in an enterprise with classroom teaching in an education or training setting”. This focus on the importance of work-based learning and apprenticeships is important for the Youth Guarantee (2015).

The European Commission has confirmed that the Department of Education and Skills is in a position to obtain a portion of the Youth Employment Initiative Funds (with a reservation of €68m for Ireland) to cover the fees currently being charged to apprentices (Sinn Féin MEP Lynn Boylan, 19 January 2016). Apprentices undertake two phases of apprenticeships training in Institutes of Technology with the average cost per student of the Student Contribution fee being €1,000 per annum.

**Costing:** €3m to remove apprenticeship college fees annually (Written Answers Nos. 134-145, 25 May 2016)

**Responsibility:** Department of Education and Skills

**Subject:** **Support and Funding for Part-Time and Further Education Students**

**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

**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 Institution. 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 (SOLAS, 2016)

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 suggests that it is due to the lack of funding for disability supports in the part time sector (AHEAD, 2014). It is unfair to punish students who are trying to further themselves through studying but due to circumstance cannot commit to attend a higher education institution in a full-time capacity. Eg. 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 required for the PTE sector as a student assistance fund support. €2.5m needs to be allocated to students who are in Further Education as a hardship fund.

**Responsibility** Department of Education and Skills



GRANTS

**Subject:** Third-Level Grants

**Proposal:** For the Government to reverse the decision made in Budget 2011 to reduce the grant by 4% and a further 3% in Budget 2012.

**Rationale:** Since January 2011 there has been a 5% increase in Ireland's CPI (CSO, 2014) and there has been an increase in the average rent nationwide of 9.3% in the year to March 2016 (Daft, 2016). *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education* (2016) states that "an additional €100 million would be needed to fund student financial aid", and part of this must go to reversing these cuts.

**Costing:** €12.3m

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

**Subject:** Grant Adjacency Rates

**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.

The current qualifying distance of 45km 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 various reasons. These reason include:

- Some rural public transport links are poor to the point that students miss early or late lectures example: Birr Co. Offaly, population 5,800 is 40km from its nearest third level institution, Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). The earliest a student can arrive in AIT using public transport is 1.25pm;
- The adjacent grant exists to provide maintenance for those who are capable of commuting and provides for students, the cost of travel may be comparable to a living cost in the college town, defeating the purpose of this rate.

**Example:** Bundoran, Co. Donegal, population 2,500 is 35km from its nearest third level institution, IT Sligo. The cost of using public transport to travel from Bundoran to IT Sligo is €60.80 per week. Student accommodation in Sligo is available from €67.50 per week (see IT Sligo Students' Union Ard Nua Village rates for 2016) with private rented accommodation available from €55 per week (Daft.ie, 2016)

**Costing:** €27 million (Dáil Éireann: Written Answers, 2016)

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

**Subject:** Postgraduate Grants

**Proposal:** For the Government to fully reinstate the postgraduate grant in Budget 2017.

**Rationale:** The postgraduate maintenance grant was abolished in Budget 2012 and replaced by a postgraduate fee contribution of between €2,000 and €6,270 depending on income with thresholds of €31,500 and €22,703 respectively. Investing in National Ambition: A strategy for funding higher education stated "The removal of maintenance supports for postgraduate students is of particular concern and there is a 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 is calling on the Government to fully reinstate to postgraduate grant in Budget 2017.

**Costing:** €53 million (Dáil Éireann: Written Answers, 2016)

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

# STUDENT ASSISTANCE FUND

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Student Assistance Fund (SAF)</b>
<b>Proposal:</b>	For the Government to begin phased restoration to 2012 rates to reflect the real costs attached to participation in Higher Level Education in Ireland.
<b>Rationale:</b>	<p>Budget 2017 should increase the financial support allocated to the SAF and address the shortfall in funding to this student-centred resource. USI welcomes the additional allocation of €1million in the last 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.</p> <p>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 the SUSI structure 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)</p> <p>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. The <i>DIT Campus Life Cost of Living Guide</i> estimates the cost of studying at third level is a minimum of €11,000 per annum if a student is studying away from home, and €6,897 if a student is able to remain at home while studying. 15.2% of those living below the poverty line in Ireland are students (NERI, 2015) while the cost of renting has increased by 9.3% nationally (Daft.ie, 2016).</p> <p>There has also been a significant increase in the Student Contribution charge of €1,925 (from €825 in 2007/08 to €3000 in 2015/1). 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 and need supports to urgently be made available for when they are in need. 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 a priority given to undergraduate students.</p> <p>The fund must be restored to 2012 rates of €11m. It is currently at €6,599,999. While the process of allocation varies across institutions and is due review, the levels of funding are still not meeting the pressing need to ensure student retention and support urgently needed in the system.</p>
<b>Costing:</b>	<p>2016 Budget: + €1m to €8m</p> <p>2017 Budget: + €1m to €9m</p> <p>2018 Budget: + €1m to €10m</p> <p>2019 Budget: + €1m to €11m</p>
<b>Responsibility:</b>	Department of Education and Skills

# MENTAL HEALTH

**Subject:** Mental Health Funding

**Proposal:** For the Government to ring-fence funding of €37.5m annually and to put emphasis on local 24/7 crisis intervention services.

**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 of the utmost importance and should be a priority alongside annual ring fenced funding from Budget 2017.

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. 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 with someone in mental or emotional distress. A decade after *A Vision for Change* (2006), the recommendations to provide community based services, crisis homes and intervention support services are not available. Supports should be available on a 24/7 basis and should include the capacity to respond in a multidisciplinary way. It is proposed that there should be a 'crisis house' within each catchment area, offering brief accommodation to service users who need a safe place to recover their bearings and work with the CMHT to evolve a care plan that will address the key factors that have precipitated their crisis. ultimately forcing individuals to an Emergency department, many of which are students.

The environment of an A & E coupled with lack of present expertise surrounding mental and emotional health is severely damaging for students. With near to 11,126 cases involving 8708 individuals presenting to services in 2014 due to self-harm (National Suicide research Foundation Annual Report, 2014) and with 487 confirmed suicides in 2013 and provisional figures of 451 suicides in 2015 (CSO), ring-fenced funding towards services and community developments should be considered in Budget 2017. From the *EU Youth Report* (2015), Ireland is ranked within the top 4 for suicide rate among 15-24. This further confirms with 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 (Suicide & Young People - the Irish Situation Dr Gary McDonald). USI with Mental Health Reform, propose the Government invest in mental health supports and services to allow them to develop.

**Costing:** €37.5m

**Responsibility:** Department of Health

**Subject:** Counselling Services on Third-Level Campuses

**Proposal:** For the Government to invest in third level mental health counselling.

**Rationale:** Ireland has some of the highest levels of participation in third-level education within the EU (EuroStat, 2013). 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 supporting that, almost 75% of all mental disorders first emerge between the ages of 15 and 25 (Hickie, 2004; Kessler et al, 2005; Kim-Cohen et al, 2003).

The provision of counselling services to meet the growing numbers and diverse needs of students has not kept pace. Currently waiting lists can be up to six weeks which raises serious concern if a student is in distress. 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). In light of the considerable demand students are experiencing and their fundamental importance to students in need, higher education institutions' budget allocations for counselling services, infrastructure and mental health supports should be ring-fenced.

**Costing:** €5m ring-fenced for student counselling and supports per annum

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



# SOCIAL WELFARE UNDER 26S

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Social Welfare for Under 26s</b>
<b>Proposal:</b>	For the Government to set the rate for all people under the age 26s to currently on reduced Jobseekers rates should have their payments set at the minimum adult rate of €188 per week.
<b>Rationale:</b>	<p>The current social welfare rates for under 26 year olds (introduced in Budget 2014) is a financial penalty for unemployed graduates and youths in Ireland with 39% of young people struggling to make ends meet nationally (NYCI, 2014). The Programme for Government (38) states, "Before the economic collapse, Ireland had the highest rate of jobless households in Europe, facilitated by educational disadvantage, poor childcare, and a passive social welfare system".</p> <p>The unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds (youth unemployment rate) decreased from 21.5% to 16.9% over the year to Q1 2016 (CSO, 2016). Despite initiatives to incentivise young people to work with 3,250 places being created since 2013 (NYCI, 2016) there are 16,082 young people in long-term unemployment seeing majority of young people struggling on €100 p/w or €144 p/w.</p> <p>Ireland currently has the fourth highest number of young people who are 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEETs) in the European Union with 18.4% compared with the EU average of 12.9% (EuroStat, 2014). Even if young job-seekers entered the Labour Market earning minimum wage the weekly take home pay (minus USC) is approximately €329. This should be considered a financial incentive to work compared to the proposed €188 p/w rate (NYCI, 2016). Despite efforts to implementing the <i>Pathways to Work's 5 Year Strategy</i>, which aims to help 50,000 Long-Term Unemployed (unemployed for 12 months) people into jobs (Department of Social Protection, 2015), there are 179,500 persons unemployed (CSO, 2016). 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 (Department of Social Protection, 2016), young people cannot survive on the current Jobseekers' Allowances with the cost of living of a single adult being €184 pw (Vincentian Partnership, 2013).</p>
<b>Costing:</b>	€149m (Dáil Éireann Written Answers, 25 November 2015)
<b>Responsibility:</b>	Department of Social Protection

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*Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn*

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