



# a living crisis, a student crisis

**pre-budget submission from the Union of Students in Ireland  
for Budget 2023**



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A chara,

The cost-of-living crisis is not a newly emerging issue for the students of Ireland. Between the highest third level fees in the EU and the complete lack of affordable purpose-built student accommodation, many students are forced to choose between paying bills or putting food on the table. While Ireland may call itself “The Land of Saints and Scholars”, those actively pursuing higher education are met with an increasing number of financial barriers.



Following the formation of the Department of Higher Education, many thought that the issues facing third level students would, for the first time, be prioritised by the Government. Unfortunately, the main issues facing most students have been largely unresolved.

The student accommodation crisis is probably the worst it has ever been. Many students are facing a year of lengthy commutes as there simply is not enough beds to house the number of students that require them. While course places are continuously growing to kickstart economic growth, there is no effort being made to ensure affordable living spaces see a similar increase.

Access to education should not be limited to those who can afford it. Every person has a right to an education, but the higher education sector is becoming increasingly exclusionary as a result of our €3,000 Student Contribution Charge, coupled with the many hidden fees that students face when engaging with course work. While the planned increase in funding to the higher education sector is certainly welcomed, there needs to be a parallel commitment to the abolition of fees.

In this submission, USI has outlined our key asks for Budget 2023. These proposals would result in a significant increase in the quality of life for students, as well illustrating a commitment to the demarketisation of higher education. Investment in higher education is an investment into the future of Ireland, and we hope that you will consider these proposals.

Beth O'Reilly,  
Uachtarán AMLÉ  
President, USI

August 2022



# A MODEL FOR PUBLICLY FUNDED HIGHER EDUCATION

**Ireland still has the highest student fees in the European Union. While the government has made commitments to review this, no such commitments have led to an actual reduction in fees.**

Despite the government's commitment to plugging the core funding gap of €307 million, there has been no defined timeline on how this funding would take place and the plan said that the Student Contribution Charge (SCC) would continue to be a key part of the funding system.

The student contribution charge is not the solution. USI repeats its call to move to a fully publicly funded higher education system, free at the point of access for all students. It should remove the need for significant private funding, which is the highest in the EU at 50% due to a lack of state funding.

The student/staff ratio has played a significant role in Ireland's under-delivery of higher education. While the European average is 15:1, this is 20:1 in Ireland and can vary depending on the HEI (Higher Education Institution). Tackling staffing shortages and moving away from hundred-student lecture halls allows students to get the best education.

Investing in digitally enhanced learning and Universal Design for Learning is critical to ensure that education is accessible for all students. We envision a learning environment that allows students to learn how they want, watch back lectures and feel included in education. It should be the default rather than an exception to be truly universal.

An increase in CAO (Central Applications Office) places has put further pressure on the student accommodation prices and further increases student-staff ratios, creating a situation where HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) take these places for added funding but at the detriment of the student experience and education quality.

Therefore, investment in publicly funded higher education is the only choice that can help students overall in tackling the cost of living and the cost of college for the betterment of Irish society and students.

## OUR VISION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

- A commitment to publicly funded higher education, without student fees
- A focus on seeing education through a lens of learning, not economic
- An education for all, not just those who can afford it

# STUDENT FEES & STUDENT UNION AUTONOMY



**In recent months, a €1,000 euro reduction in the Student Contribution Charge has been mooted. Even with this proposed reduction, Ireland would still have the highest fees in the EU for Irish undergraduate students.**

We call for a €1,000 reduction in the SCC to ensure that Ireland does not further behind in access to education for all. This is a major barrier highlighted in the increased cost of living, which students especially face pressure on.

In 2016, 23% of students skipped lectures to work and 26% worked to cover their education costs and has certainly increased with rising living cost pressures. Students should be able to focus on their studies rather than working long hours. A fee reduction would achieve this for many students.

For postgraduate students, re-instating postgraduate grants to pre-budget 2012 levels would allow tens of thousands of students to further their studies and focus on their studies without having to rely on a job to the side just to afford their education.

While Irish students pay the highest fees in the EU, international students face significantly higher fees. These include extra costs on visas, language courses and added costs of international relocation. Plac-

ing specific emphasis on reducing their costs, and the reliance of HEIs to set higher fees for those students, can ensure Ireland attracts students for the quality of education, not the profit they can make.

This status also applies to students who have not lived in Ireland or another EU member state for 3/5 years, even if these students may be Irish or EU citizens. This penalises students who may have emigrated and wish to return to Ireland. USI calls for more relaxed conditions of residency for these people to supply incentives for those returning to further their education, rather than being expected to pay extortionate fees.

We also note the HEA (Higher Education Authority) bill which is currently at the Report Stage in an Seanad. We call on the Government to support amendments which define a Students' Union, allow for full engagement of the HEI community on major changes and ensure trade union representation among other amendments. This will strengthen the ability of the SU to protect students' rights and provide students with the best third level education experience.

## OUR ASKS

- Re-instate postgraduate grants (First-year cost) - €39.7M
- €1,000 reduction in the Student Contribution Charge - €83.2M
- Placing emphasis on reducing the cost of International and Postgraduate fees
- Less strict residency criteria for returning Irish & EU citizens who have lived outside the EU
- Supporting amendments to the HEA bill to improve SU and student representation

# APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships provide valuable opportunities to participants to develop advanced skills and experience further and higher education. USI welcomed the Apprenticeship Action Plan, which aims to increase the number of apprenticeships to 10,000 by 2025 through a national apprenticeship office.

We still need investment in apprenticeships to promote them as an authentic alternative route to high level skills and a potential stepping stone to higher-level courses without added financial burdens.

The removal of apprenticeship registration fees would make education truly accessible and form part of making it free at the point of access for all students. This needs to be in tandem with efforts to improve CAO places for those doing PLCs (Post Leaving Certificate Courses), because of fewer opportunities for those who study to progress their education into level 7 & 8 courses.

Further, the apprentice bursary scheme should be doubled as per the Apprenticeship Action Plan, ensuring those who may have financial difficulties in paying can still achieve the education to further their choices.

## OUR ASKS

- A removal of apprenticeships registration fees - €6.5M
- Double the apprentice bursary outlined within the Apprenticeship Action Plan

# TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

The innovation of the TU (Technological University) sector has been a challenging process. While there have been some successes in the merging of ITs to form TUs, the process has presented major challenges for students.

The lack of consistency in the formation and envisaged functions of TUs presents major challenges for educators and students alike.

The USI calls for a strategic review of the TU sector. It should establish protocols for the forma-

tion, development and functions of the TU and principles for consistent student representation, irrespective of which campus they study on.

It was recently clarified that TUs may borrow money to build student accommodation on campus; USI welcomed this and urges progress to deal with the accommodation shortage - with an obligation in legislation to ensure that new TU campus accommodation is affordable to students. USI calls for this permission to be extended to IoTs remaining after the formation of TUs.

## OUR ASKS

- Commitment to a strategic review of how TUs are formed and developed
- Legislation to ensure that TUs can only borrow money on premise of affordable accommodation

**Students who choose to study creative courses face unique challenges because of the underfunding of both the Arts and Higher Education Sector. On top of this, unique needs of creative arts students often go unconsidered in high level discussions around higher education funding. Increased collaboration is needed between the DFHERIS and the Department of TCAGSM.**

Creative arts students often have added costs for software to allow them to fully engage with their course material. The industry standard currently is full Adobe Suite access, which can cost students upwards of €1,300 for the duration of a four-year degree. As well as

this, the cost of physical materials for creative students is growing increasingly with inflation and added on to the overall cost of pursuing a degree, this results in creative courses being a less practical choice for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

For artists and creative students with disabilities, there are other emerging problems as highlighted by the Disabled Artists, Disabled Academics Campaigns (DADA). One of the primary issues is how disabled artists are penalised for industry success by losing access to core disability supports once they are growing as an artist. USI supports the DADA Campaign in their calls for the introduction of a Disabled Self Employment Support Scheme

## OUR ASKS

- Funding to purchase a full Adobe Suite of software for creative students - €1.2 million
- Creation of a designated "Materials Fund" for creative students - €3 million initially with review done at the end of year 1.
- Creation of a Disabled Self Employment Support Scheme.

# ACCOMMODATION

**The student accommodation crisis compares to the worst it has ever been.**

**Students are being forced into long commutes, living in short-term digs and couch surfing. While new purpose-built student accommodation is being built, most of it is by any measure unaffordable. Students are being exploited in a housing crisis for excessive profit by accommodation providers.**

Yet the Housing for All plan mentions the word 'student' only nine times.

The 2017 Student Accommodation Strategy resulted in extortionately priced luxury student accommodation, and today only 19% of Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) is publicly owned. USI calls for capital grants to be prioritised for PBSA to be built by universities, to ensure that PBSA built is affordable and fast-tracked in planning.

USI believes that housing is a civil and human right which should be added to the Irish constitution in a future referendum.

We call for significant action to refurbish vacant and derelict houses to ensure anyone who wishes to call Ireland their home can have a place.

With increased construction costs and inflationary pressures, a new student accommodation strategy is desperately needed, to prioritise the urgent delivery of affordable student beds which meet the needs of students.

Too many students depend on "digs" or living with a host family, with no legal protections. In the short term, the government must introduce legislation to protect those students and ensure digs are only a short-term solution until affordable PBSA is built.

Guidelines allow developers after ten years of renting to students to change their usage, which has opened student accommodation to tourist accommodation. In the Dublin City Council area 1,055 student beds were to the short-term let market by May 2022.

Restrictions on change of usage from 10 years to only on a case-by-case basis are urgently required.

International students face added challenges, with almost half of English language students sharing a room with three or more people according to the Irish Council for International Students. A bill on Overcrowded Housing was proposed in 2018. It should again be introduced, enacting a statutory standard for overcrowding.

## OUR ASKS

- A new Student Accommodation Strategy
- Introduction of legislation to protect students in "digs" accommodation
- Capital grants for PBSA on university lands and conditions to ensure affordability
- Re-introducing the Overcrowded housing bill 2018
- Revision of the "Guidelines on Residential Developments for 3rd level students"
- Introduction of a Right to Housing in Bunreacht na hÉireann
- Introduction of a Rent Freeze

**In the absence of affordable accommodation, many students today face having to commute for hours each way to college. While we welcomed the introduction of the Young Adult Travel Card earlier this year, the fundamental problem of the cost of travel remains unaddressed.**

USI believes that solving the problem of travel costs in Ireland is compatible with tackling the climate crisis and providing alternatives to car commuting, which 42% of students living outside of Dublin rely upon.

Expanding the Youth Travel Card to 24-and 25-year-olds would allow older students to apply for the young adult travel card, with a view to making public transport free for students by 2025.

Drawing on the success of the Cycle to Work Scheme, USI believes a bike-to-college scheme would allow students to benefit from cheaper and more sustainable ways to travel. In the interim, the expansion of bike sharing schemes outside of major Dublin cities accessible to students in

HEIs would improve the commute for many students.

Many students, particularly in rural areas, experience unreliable public transport. Cancelled buses mean students miss lectures, inaccessible trains for those with disabilities, and early service termination means that students cannot avail of extracurricular and social activities.

USI calls for increased investment in public transportation and a reduction in fares to allow a modal shift from private motor vehicles to public transport.

USI is a member of the Alliance for Insurance Reform, which has several key recommendations which we echo in reducing the cost of insurance for students. This includes the enactment and commencement of the duty of care amendments to the Occupiers Liability Act 1995, as well as the Personal Injuries Resolution Board Bill 2022 and reducing the cost of car insurance for students.

## OUR ASKS

- Expanding the Youth Travel Card to 24 years old - €5M
- Creating a bike-to-college scheme on a similar framework to the bike-to-work scheme - €0.5M per annum
- Implementing the YAC on rural, commercial bus operators and taxis - €30M
- Expanding bike sharing schemes outside of major cities - €1.3M per 15-station scheme (Waterford, Athlone, Dundalk, Tralee, Ennis = €6.5M)
- Enactment and commencement of the duty of care amendments to the Occupiers Liability Act 1995, as well as the Personal Injuries Resolution Board Bill 2022.

# STUDENT WORKERS

**Geopolitical pressures and profiteering have driven the cost of living higher in recent months. This has and will continue to disproportionately affect students, who only can work so many hours while balancing their studies and their personal lives.**

Recognising how many students only receive an average of €12 an hour, lower than the living wage of €12.90, USI calls for the living wage to become the new official minimum wage. This living wage reflects the proposal of the Living Wage Technical Group. USI anticipates that the Living Wage is likely to be increased in 2022.

wage to be scrapped. Currently, workers under 20 years old may be paid less than the minimum wage, which can especially hurt first and second-year students who work minimum-wage jobs.

USI believes that work should be paid fairly, irrespective of the age of the person doing the work.

Further, equalising the rates of jobseekers' allowance for under twenty-fives to the full rate for all age groups is crucial, as young people face the same living costs as any other age demographic, yet are given less if they do not have a job after college.

## OUR ASKS

- Establish the minimum wage to be the living wage as per the Living Wage Technical Group by 2025 (As of August 2022 stands at €12.90)
- Normalise the minimum wage for those under 20 years old - €23M

# FINANCIAL SUPPORTS



**Coupled with the cost-of-living crisis, students are facing unprecedented times of financial uncertainty. There is a major increase in the number of students needing financial help.**

**Providing support to those students who need it is crucial to ensure fair access to education.**

SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) is not fit for purpose and needs urgent radical reform to reflect the current cost of living.

USI calls for the maintenance grant and SUSI thresholds to be amended to reflect the current cost of living. This would extend financial support to more students and provide urgently needed support in the cost-of-living crisis.

USI calls on SUSI to recognise the existence of estranged students. Those who are not under the care of a legal guardian do not qualify for the grant without verification from An Garda Síochána or Tusla.

Students who are estranged from their legal guardian must go through a lengthy and expensive process to receive a letter. This further marginalis-

es those who need financial support, and in too many cases bars them from third level education.

USI believes student support should be accessible to students regardless of the status of their degree. SUSI is currently only available for full time students. This prevents students from completing their degrees on a part time basis, which limits participation and exerts additional financial pressure.

The Student Assistance Fund (SAF), exists for students in financial need to cover education costs that are not covered by SUSI, such as textbooks and medical expenses. However, with the current cost of living, students are being forced to spend this money on day-to-day living expenses.

We believe that the SAF threshold should be expanded further to help more students. We are calling for more funding to be allocated to the SAF to expand availability and the value of grants.

## OUR ASKS

- SUSI to reflect the current cost of living in Ireland
- SUSI to recognise estranged students without documents from An Garda Síochána or Tusla
- Extending SUSI support to part-time learners.
- Maintaining the added funding for the SAF post-COVID-19 - €8.1M
- Increase maintenance grant by an added €1000 - €61M (as per Social Justice Ireland pre-budget).

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

**Pre-pandemic the number of students presenting with mental illnesses in third level was increasing. AHEAD noted a pre-pandemic 127% increase in students registered as having a mental illness with disability services over a 5-year period, as well as recording an 8.1% increase in the same number from the 2018/2019 – 2019/2020 academic years (a likely under-reported figure given the requirement by most HEIs and the DARE scheme for consultant psychiatry-based diagnoses only).**

PCHEI (Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland) data shows that the number of students seeking mental health help is continuing to increase, and global research “supports the existence of an emotional epidemic curve, describing a high probability of an increase in the burden of mental health issues in the post pandemic era”

Wait lists and under-resourced services pre-pandemic have been well documented elsewhere and while the interim €5 million funding supplied last year was beneficial in temporarily addressing these issues, only ring-fenced, multi-annual funding will allow counselling services to recruit and keep high quality staff, as well as a commitment to keeping the total amount spent annually at higher levels than pre-pandemic and at a level that will continue to meet current needs.

It has been noted elsewhere that international best practice dictates a ratio of 1 counsellor per 1000 students, a benchmark which the Irish HEI sector is some

way from reaching currently. PCHEI have estimated a minimum of 28 FTE counsellors are required currently to meet this benchmark, and USI would support this ask alongside a commitment to multi-annual funding.

It is recognised in the recent National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework that a more holistic, whole-of-campus approach must be taken towards student mental health going forward. While student counsellors have played a vital role in student mental health, it is important that as part of the implementation of the Framework that serious efforts are made to move towards a more collaborative approach with both on- and off-campus services. It cannot be a task that is handed to currently already overloaded HEI staff to roll out. Separate funding must be supplied for the purpose of enabling the rollout of the Framework (and other such policies) on campuses, as well as developing stronger referral and collaborative care pathways between HSE (Health Service Executive) services such as Child and Adolescent, and Adult Mental Health Services.

In the longer-term, plans must be put in place to ensure that there is adequate logistics support for more mental health staff on campus, such as office space etc, as well as addressing the chronic shortage of qualified mental health professionals in Ireland by addressing trainee funding and employment mechanisms.

## OUR ASKS

- Hiring 28 new FTE counsellors to meet 1 counsellor per 1000 students - €17.5M
- Separate funding of the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention framework
- Maintain and protect current spending on student mental health post-pandemic - €5M

# SEXUAL HEALTH



**USI welcomed the decision of the government this year to provide free contraception for people aged 17-25.**

**USI believes that this should be accessible to all.**

With the current cost of living crisis that people are experiencing in Ireland, budgets are being stretched to unattainable levels. By introducing a barrier to accessing free contraception, the health of

individuals is being jeopardised.

A lack of access to free contraceptive methods, whether it be condoms or the bar, can lead to further health complications. People are unable to look after their health to their fullest potential. Health care is a human right, and USI believes that anybody who wishes to avail of free contraceptive methods should be free to do.

## OUR ASKS

- Invest €80M into expanding the free contraception scheme to make it accessible to people of all ages.
- Continue the roll out of the National Condom Distribution Service.

# DRUG AND ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION

**An increased dependency of young people on substances (drugs, alcohol, solvents etc) has emerged since the COVID-19 crisis.**

**USI believes this calls for a harm reduction approach.**

According to the Health Research Board, out of those surveyed aged 18-24, 55% of men and 50% of females used at least 3 drugs in the past year. This tallies with the observations of students' unions and support services on campus. 80% of people said that they took drugs to relieve stress.

USI believes that adopting a harm reduction approach is the most suitable way to tackle the current drug trend.

Without education on safe drug use, the health of the

individual is at risk. We are calling for the government to establish a Drug Liaison Nurse specific for college students alongside the Students' Unions, and to support frequent targeted drug harm reduction campaigns on campus and beyond throughout the year.

According to the Alcohol Action Ireland's 2022 report, the highest age bracket of people with an Alcohol Use Disorder are those between ages 15-24.

This aspect of dependency on substances is often overlooked in Irish society, with most social events surrounding the consumption of alcohol and taking place in the party scene. We are calling for a Separate Alcohol Liaison Nurse for college students who are struggling with addiction or dependency of illegal substances

## OUR ASKS

- Establish a Drug Liaison Nurse specific to students - €3 million.
- Continue drug harm reduction educational campaigns nationally.
- Alcohol Liaison Nurse - €3M

# POSTGRADUATE SUPPORTS

**The importance of cultivating the postgraduate researcher (PGR) experience is crucial. Our PGRs (Postgraduate research) are the future of the R&I system and should be nurtured to support them reach their full potential for the R&I sector in Ireland.**

There is no publicly available information on funding which puts key questions on the transparency on stipends and a framework implemented for fair funding. The PGR funding sources differ dramatically depending on area of study, eligibility status, supplementary income, awards or scholarships, Government stipends, industry sponsorship or institutional bursaries.

According to the USI Postgraduate Research Student Survey 2022, average stipend rates are €13,850 for universities, €11,067 for IOT/TUs and €9,071 for MA tracking PhD. This is additional to about 18.7% of Postgraduate Research students report being entirely self-funded and those doing postgraduate on part-time basis. Raising the national stipend can have a later effect on the talent attracted into research, the quality of the research, living conditions and mental health of PGRs.

The government announced Innovate for Ireland, a new scheme to attract up to 400 PhD candidates to undertake research in Ireland that tackles national and global grand challenges. It includes a stipend of €28,000 per year. leaving more than 7,938 full-time PhD students who are already facing a significant pay gap. The USI has signed a letter headed by the PhD Collective Action Union calling on all PhD stipends to be paid at €28,00 per year to ensure equity among PhD students.

The IUA (Irish Universities Association) 2020 report entitled Irish universities socio-economic impact reported €8.9Bn return per annum from 7 Irish Universities from government investment of €1Bn. The return from Irish Universities proves that investment in public sector research generates a multiplier effect. If all 7,938 PGRs were paid €28,000 in line with Innovate for Ireland, it would cost the Government €222.26M. The return from Irish Universities proves that investment in this case investing €222.26M to PGR would see a return of €1.9BN to the economy.

Many PGRs undertake academic duties such as lecturing, student supervision, administration, and service to colleges. These working hours should be paid as they are work hours on top of an already heavy research workload. PhD students face significant extra challenges in their position as both students as well as workers in research. While they are expected to receive a contribution given their full-time role as a researcher, this often is insufficient for most living costs, forcing many PhD students to have to work added jobs just to make ends meet. Ireland's funding model should be in line with the rest of the EU counties which are paying PGRs as per their employment rights. Ireland agreed to improve gender equality as one of its priorities with the European Research Area (ERA) policy framework. Statutory maternity cover should be made available to postgraduate researchers under the HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund.

## OUR ASKS

- Introduce a national minimum research stipend of €28,000 for all PGRs (Adjusted inflation and reviewed annually. - €222.3M (Return of €1.9BN to the economy.)
- A strategic review of the work PGRs are engaged in across all HEI's to ensure fair compensation for additional work
- Allocate €100K for the HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund specifically to pursuing gender equality, directly affect postgraduate research students.

# PLACEMENTS



**Students have played a significant role following on from the COVID-19 pandemic, working beyond what they are meant to do in their placement time. This includes students working in COVID-19 wards and teachers doing placement to fill in gaps for schools where full-time teachers were out due to COVID-19.**

This ensured society kept running when it otherwise may have faced added pressures, and why those on placement should be seen as something valuable and paid in return for the value they provide.

However, these placements are rarely paid well, and in some cases unpaid. Many students who need to do a placement often only get a stipend for their time, which does not cover the full cost of living in tandem with their placement.

Many student nurses have also yet to receive the recognition payment, which while a general issue, places added pressure on student nurses who have already been underpaid additionally many student healthcare workers are not even aware of their ability to claim these payments.

## OUR ASKS

- Paying students who are on placement the living wage rather than a reliance of stipends and grants
- Ensuring that recognition payments are sorted at the earliest opportunity

# UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

**Universal Design Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.**

This is a new model of teaching which emphasizes accessibility, both on the subject being taught as well as physical accessibility, through measures such as online resources for both watching lectures online, presentations, added learning content and interactive resources.

It seems strange that this right to work from home is not extended to those who may need to learn from home, due to a disability or being immunocompromised, or simply unable to afford to travel due to the Cost-of-Living crisis.

Continued funding of the laptop loan scheme would allow students from disadvantaged backgrounds to be able to learn without challenges and at the same level as other students.

Many students and lecturers alike have seen a fall in engagement, both from external factors of having to work, as well as fewer resources due to HEIs COVID-19 concerns. The student engagement fund was a welcome addition that supplied a boost in getting students back onto campus after almost 18 months absent. However, with lower levels of engagement still present, the continuation of this fund is necessary to further help students engage.

## OUR ASKS

- Continuation of the device lending scheme - €20 million
- Increased investment in ICT facilities in lectures to allow hybrid learning - €5M
- Student Engagement Project fund - €5 million

# ASYLUM SEEKERS & REFUGEES

Asylum Seekers and refugees face massive barriers to accessing further and higher education. Many of them are considered international students and therefore asked to pay fees of over €10,000, which places a wall on higher education access for those students. While individual HEIs have introduced sanctuary schemes, there has been no consistent offering.

It has also led to incredibly awful situations where

students who are seeking asylum are refused and threatened with deportation, in the middle of their educational studies. USI urges the introduction of legislation that protects these students from facing deportation threats until at least they complete their studies.

It is also disappointing to see reports that the white paper to end Direct Provision will not achieve its aim of ending Direct Provision by 2024. USI calls for an urgent review of this to set up a set plan and date for ending Direct Provision at the earliest opportunity, recognising the abhorrent system it is.

## OUR ASKS

- Remove resident criteria from Free Fees Initiative for asylum seekers
- Repealing the 27th amendment of the constitution
- End Direct Provision

# IRISH LANGUAGE

Budget 2020 saw the Gaeltacht Grant reinstated for student teachers attending mandatory placement in the Gaeltacht. However, this does not currently extend to students in private colleges despite similar costs to state-funded institutions and USI believe this should be extended.

This presents an opportunity to fund costs such as the téimhse foghlama sa Ghaeltacht and removing the need that students should handle financing part of the course themselves.

Within the Department, Culture and the Arts have seen increases of €158 million, while Heritage has

seen an increase in of €112 million. Gaeilge and the Gaeltacht have only seen an increase of €32 million in funding. There is need for significant funding increases to Udarás na Gaeilge to allow for students from the Gaeltacht to avail of funding to allow them to continue their progression in education through Irish.

The Irish language also needs to be strengthened with the Government's target of 20% of newly recruited services being fluent in Irish by 2030 under the Official Languages Act. This requires HEIs to teach more subjects outside of Irish to be taught through the medium of Irish and to ensure increased funding of the OÉG can ensure Irish is funded to be taught and expanded across the island.

## OUR ASKS

- Funding of mandatory Gaeltacht placement for all student teachers - €2.8m
- Development of a scheme for HEIs via the HEA to allow them to avail of funding specifically for the promotion of the Irish Language.
- Increased funding for OÉG - €2 million
- Increased funding for Foras na Gaeilge - €3 million
- Increased funding for Udarás na Gaeilge - €8 million

## Higher Education

- Re-instate postgraduate grants (First-year cost) - €39.72 million
- €1,000 reduction in the Student Contribution Charge - €83.2 million
- Funding to purchase a full Adobe Suite of software for creative students - €1.2 million
- Creation of a designated "Materials Fund" for creative students - €3 million initially
- Remove apprenticeship registration fees - €6.47 million
- A roadmap for the investment in core funding of €307 million
- A commitment to the abolition of the student contribution charge
- A commitment to a publicly funded higher education model
- Placing emphasis on reducing the cost of International and Postgraduate fees
- Less strict residency criteria for returning Irish & EU citizens
- Supporting amendments to the HEA bill to improve SU and student representation
- Double the apprentice bursary/support scheme outlined in the Apprenticeship Plan
- Improve number of CAO places for those who have completed PLCs
- Commitment to a strategic review of how TUs are formed and developed
- Legislation to ensure that TUs can only borrow money on premise of affordable accommodation
- Creation of a Disabled Self Employment Support Scheme

## Cost of Living

- Expanding the Youth Travel Card to 24 years old - €5 million
- Creating a bike-to-college scheme like how the bike-to-work schemes run - €0.5million
- Expanding bike sharing schemes outside of major cities - €1.3 million per 15-station scheme (€6.5 for 5 cities)
- Implementing the YAC on rural, commercial bus operators and taxis - €30 million
- Normalise the minimum wage for those under 20 years old - €23 million
- Enactment and commencement of the

duty of care amendments to the Occupiers Liability Act 1995, as well as the Personal Injuries Resolution Board Bill 2022.

- Establish the minimum wage to be the living wage as per the Living Wage Technical Group by 2025 (As of August 2022 stands at €12.90)

## Cost of Accommodation

- A new Student Accommodation Strategy
- Introduction of legislation to protect students in "digs" accommodation
- Capital grants for PBSA on university lands and conditions to ensure affordability
- Re-introducing the Overcrowded housing bill 2018
- Revision of the "Guidelines on Residential Developments for 3rd level students"
- Introduction of a Right to Housing in Bunreacht na hÉireann
- Introduction of a Rent Freeze

## Health & Welfare

- Maintaining the added funding for the SAF post-COVID-19 - €8.1 million.
  - Increase maintenance grant by an added €1000 - €61 million
  - Hiring 28 new FTE counsellors to meet 1 counsellor per 1000 students - €17.5 million.
  - Separate funding of the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention framework
  - Maintain and protect current spending on student mental health post-COVID - €5 million
  - Expanding the free contraception scheme to make it accessible to people of all ages - €80 million
  - Alcohol Liaison Nurse - €3 million.
  - Establish a Drug Liaison Nurse specific to students - €3 million.
  - SUSI to reflect the current cost of living in Ireland
  - SUSI to recognise estranged students without documents from An Garda Síochána/Tusla
  - Extending SUSI support to part-time learners.
  - Continue the roll out of the National Condom Distribution Service.
- Continue drug harm reduction educational campaigns nationally.

# ALL OF OUR ASKS

## Research & Innovation

- Introduce a national minimum research stipend of €28,000 for all PGRs - €222.26M
- HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund specifically to pursuing gender equality - €100k
- A strategic review of the work PGR students is engaged in across all HEI's is needed to ensure Postgraduates are paid fairly for work completed outside of their research.

## Access to Education

- Continuation of the device lending scheme - €20m
- Increased investment in ICT facilities in lectures to allow hybrid learning - €5m
- Paying students who are on placement the living wage based on the Living Wage Technical Group for any placements, rather than a reliance of stipends and grants
- Ensuring that recognition payments are sorted at the earliest opportunity
- Remove resident criteria from Free Fees Initiative for asylum seekers
- Repealing the 27th amendment of the constitution
- Urgent review to allow for the Ending of Direct Provision with a more humane system
- Student Engagement Project fund - €5m
- Full state funding of mandatory Gaeltacht placement for all student teachers - €2.8m
- Increased funding for the OÉG - €2m
- Increased funding for Foras na Gaeilge - €3m
- Development of a scheme for HEIs to avail of through the HEA to allow them to avail of funding specifically for the promotion of the Irish Language.
- Increased funding for Udarás na Gaeilge - €8m

## Cost of Costed Items:

**€644.35M**

# USI EXECUTIVE TEAM 2022-2023



President  
Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Vice President for Welfare  
Vice President for Equality and Citizenship  
Vice President for Campaigns  
Leas Uachtarán don Ghaeilge  
Vice President for Postgraduate Affairs  
Vice President for the Border, Mid-lands and Western Region  
Vice President for the Dublin Region  
Vice President for the Southern Region  
President NUS-USI

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The Executive Team would like to acknowledge the participation and contribution of members of the Comhairle Náisiúnta, USI Staff and allied organisations in the development of the Pre Budget Submission.



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