



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



**help out  
or get out**

**Pre-budget Submission  
for Budget 2025**

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Dublin, August 30, 2024

**As the President of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), I am privileged to present our Pre-Budget Submission for the upcoming year.**

This document is more than a series of requests—it reflects the everyday struggles faced by students across the country and a call to action for a government that holds the key to shaping the future of our generation.

In recent years, the challenges facing students in Ireland have reached unprecedented levels. The severe shortage of affordable and accessible accommodation has left many students in a constant state of anxiety, forcing them to choose between pursuing their education and securing basic living conditions. The rising cost of travel increases these difficulties, particularly for those who must commute long distances to attend their classes. Compounding these pressures is the burden of high fees, which continue to act as a significant barrier, preventing countless students from accessing the education they deserve.



These issues are not merely inconveniences; they have become crises that demand urgent attention. The housing crisis has transformed the search for student accommodation into an overwhelming ordeal, with many students faced with substandard living conditions or being pushed to travel unsustainable distances. The lack of public transport options only deepens the financial strain on students, who are already stretched thin by the cost of their education. And the high cost of tuition fees, combined with inadequate student supports, leaves many students struggling to survive, forcing some to make the heartbreaking decision to abandon their education altogether.

These challenges do not only affect individual students; they have far-reaching consequences for the entire nation. Education is the foundation of a fair and equitable society, and when we fail to adequately fund and support it, we jeopardize the future of Ireland as a whole. We cannot afford to leave any student behind.

In this Pre-Budget Submission, we call on the government to address these urgent issues. We need a significant increase in investment in student accommodation to ensure that every student has access to affordable, safe, and secure housing. We need an expansion and enhancement of public transport options to make it affordable and accessible for all students, no matter where they live. And we need a reduction in tuition fees, coupled with an increase in financial supports, to ensure that education remains a right for all, rather than a privilege for the few.

These measures are not just about supporting students; they are about investing in the future of Ireland. By ensuring that every student has the resources they need to succeed, we are building a more educated, innovative, and resilient society. The students of Ireland are ready to contribute to this future, but we need the government to stand with us.

We urge our leaders to recognize the urgency of these issues and to take decisive action in the upcoming budget. Together, we can create a brighter future for all.

Chris Clifford  
Uachtarán, USI-AMLÉ



# Student Accommodation

**Student accommodation is at a breaking point. With nearly 30,000 students who applied to on-campus Purpose Built Student Accommodation being turned down, we need investment into building affordable student accommodation now.**

Every day, due to the lack of purpose-built student accommodation, students are being forced into extremely long commutes, couch surfing, or even, in some extreme situations, sleeping in cars.

While we have seen announcements of new developments at DCU, Maynooth, and UCD, they have yet to commence these builds and instead choose to re-announce the same beds on multiple occasions. A proportion of these new rooms being built have been promised to be “affordable”, yet the government has yet to define what “affordable” means and how much these rooms will cost.

The last time a strategic plan for student accommodation was published was in January 2020. This was before the COVID-19 pandemic and before the current government took its seats in the Dáil. Since then, we have been promised a new strategy but have yet to see these plans.

USI-AMLÉ 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 to live. There are over 160,000 derelict properties in Ireland, and the tax being paid on these can be as low as €270 a year.

With increased construction costs and inflationary

pressures, a new student accommodation strategy is desperately needed to prioritise the urgent delivery of affordable student beds that meet the needs of students. Every year, we have more and more students applying to and accepting places in higher education institutions, but the supply of student accommodation is not meeting this demand.

Too many students depend on “digs” or living with a host family, with no legal protections. This means that they can be thrown out on an hour’s notice and have no rights to use the facilities in the house. 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.

International students are not exempt from the issues and challenges faced by students, and in some cases, are paying the most for student accommodation and are unable to stay in digs that only offer 5-day accommodation.

## Our Proposals

- Fund the building of the 30,000 shortfall of student accommodation - €2 billion
- 6-week emergency accommodation fund for students unable to secure accommodation - €1.35m
- Fund for emergency accommodation throughout the year - €0.5million

**With a lack of accommodation for students, more and more are being forced to commute extremely long distances every day. While the 90-minute fare was a welcome change and has helped some students, the fundamental problem of the cost of travel remains unaddressed.**

USI-AMLÉ 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.

The pricing of public transport needs to be addressed in the case of students. Some students can be spending upwards of €500 a month solely on public transport, with students commuting from the likes of Donegal and Cork to Dublin every day due to the lack of accommodation. Public transport for students should be free to alleviate this burden. An argument made against free public transport is that people will make “unnecessary journeys”; students commuting hours a day and working part-time jobs would not be making any unnecessary journeys.

Drawing on the success of the Cycle to Work scheme, USI-AMLÉ believes a Bike-to-College scheme would allow students to benefit from cheaper and more sustainable ways to travel. This scheme could help many students who may only be a 30-minute cycle away from their HEI and would let them leave whenever they want, without waiting on unreliable public transport.

In the interim, the expansion of bike-sharing schemes outside of major cities, accessible to students in HEIs, would improve the commute for many students. Many students, particularly in rural areas, experience unreliable public transport.

Cancelled and delayed buses mean students miss lectures. Along with inaccessible modes of public transport for those with disabilities and early service termination, this means that students cannot avail themselves of extracurriculars, social activities, and just being a part of the college community. With the demands that students have, and with many working part-time jobs along with their studies, more 24-hour buses are needed.

USI-AMLÉ calls for increased investment in public transportation and free public transport for all students.

## Our Proposals

- Bike to college scheme to be introduced - €0.5 million
- Free public transport for students - €200 million
- Expanding bike sharing outside of major cities and towns - €1.35 million per 15 station scheme.
- Introducing more rail services in the west of Ireland as these have been neglected in the All-Island Strategic Rail Review



# Publicly Funded Education

**The last two budgets have seen temporary reductions in the student contribution charge. This shows that there is the ability to permanently reduce this charge and start moving to abolishing fees for higher education in Ireland.**

Even with these temporary reductions, Ireland still has the highest fees in the EU for Irish undergraduate students.

With the cost-of-living crisis, the price of accommodation, and the cost of going to college, more and more students are taking up jobs just to be able to pay for their time in higher education. We need action now to allow students to focus 100% on their studies rather than working long hours.

Postgraduate and international students' fees vary from HEI to HEI. We need a cap put in place to ensure

that no HEI can charge more for the same course just because of where it is located or the perceived prestige of the institution.

Apprenticeships are another pathway into further training to acquire a trade rather than going to college. The recent shift towards less traditional forms of education, and the expansion of options available for third-level education, is welcomed by USI-AMLÉ.

However, the current systems underpinning access to apprenticeships have gradually become more exclusive and lack the required state supports to truly make them accessible to students. Apprenticeship education, like other forms of education in the State, must be fully publicly provided, and access to education must not be dictated by the financial ability of students.

## Education is a Right

**USI-AMLÉ believes that education, including third level and further education, is a right and calls upon policy to reflect that.**

While the student contribution charge is constantly referred to as 'free fees', the current model of funding has led to Ireland having the highest in the EU for undergraduate students. We reject, outright, any claim that third-level education in Ireland is publicly provided until such point where the student contribution fee is abolished.

Investment in the Higher Education System is shaped by the Cassells report, which is a pathway for an education system that is publicly funded, and free at the point of entry.

Investment in the Higher Education System should follow Option 1 of the Cassells report.

We need drastic change so that students are no longer treated as cash cows and being charged extortionate amounts for accommodation and basic student needs.

## Our Proposals

- The permanent reduction of fees by €1,500
- A plan in place to abolish fees over the next few years
- For postgraduate fees to be standardized so no one HEI can cost more than others for the same course
- The €305m current deficit for HEIs to be fully funded by Government

## **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.

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 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 socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **Our Proposals**

- Funding to purchase a full Adobe Suite of software for creative students - €1.2m
- Creation of a designated “Materials Fund” for creative students - €3m

# Graduate Entry Medicine

**Graduate Entry Medicine students can be expected to pay upwards of €17,000 for their degree.**

**These students do not qualify for any financial support to complete their course, leaving them to fund their degree themselves.**

The only way that they can fund their degree is through savings, a loan or a scholarship.

Until recently, there was a loan offered by Bank of Ireland specifically for GEM students, but this loan

was phased out of the market leaving students forced to find another way to pay for their degree.

With GP numbers falling, we should be increasing ways to train the next generation of doctors, not putting more barriers in their way.

The course was set up with the aim of diversifying the medical industry and being inclusive, but given this financial barrier, it does not achieve its original objective.

## **Our Proposals**

- Full contribution to the GEM course fees - €15m

# Supporting Students Mentally & Physically

**The importance of mental health funding cannot be overstated. Mental health challenges among students are at an all-time high, exacerbated by academic pressures, social challenges, and the ongoing impacts of the cost of living and global uncertainties.**

Adequate funding is crucial to provide comprehensive support systems, including counselling services, mental health education, and crisis intervention programs, which can effectively address these challenges. By prioritizing mental health funding, we can ensure that students receive the necessary support to thrive academically and personally, reducing dropout rates, enhancing academic performance, and promoting overall well-being.

Investing in student mental health and wellbeing is essential for fostering a resilient, healthy, and productive future generation. Increased investment in campus health services is crucial to provide fully resourced GP and nursing services across all campuses. Accessible and reliable healthcare is a fundamental aspect of student support, ensuring that physical health needs are met alongside mental health concerns.

The ratio of counsellors to students for safe and ethical practice seen in international standards is 1:1000 to 1:1500 dependent on service need. Ireland's current counsellor to student ratio is at unsafe levels, with a staff-student ratio 1:2240 according to PCHEI, the representative body of Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland.

This includes all clinical staff (counsellors, directors, assistant psychologists (APs), and sessional workers, etc.) PCHEI calculate that an investment of 11.5 million is recommended to bring us to a 1:1000 ratio, or a 4.5 million investment in staff to bring us to a 1:1500 ratio. To achieve a 1:1000 ratio would require an FTE of 244, an additional 135 FTE.

## Our Proposals

- Multiannual core funding amount to €6 million
- €5 million for maintaining the current service provision
- €1 million would help implement the Healthy Campus Framework and National Student Mental Health Suicide Prevention Framework, as well as campus mental health and wellbeing programs
- Investment in increasing the Counsellors to Students ratio - €11.5 million.



**USI-AMLÉ emphasizes the critical need for dedicated funding towards drug and alcohol harm reduction initiatives. Implementing comprehensive harm reduction programmes, including education, support services, and harm minimisation strategies, is essential for creating a safer and healthier environment for students.**

Drug and alcohol harm reduction is vital because it acknowledges the reality of substance use and focuses on minimising its adverse effects rather than solely on prevention.

By providing students with accurate information about the risks and safe practices, we empower them to make informed decisions. This includes education on the effects of various substances, the importance of moderation, and recognising the signs of overdose or adverse reactions.

Support services, such as counselling and peer support groups, are crucial components of harm reduction. These services offer a non-judgemental space for students to discuss their experiences and seek help if needed.

Access to mental health professionals and trained counsellors can assist students in managing substance use issues and provide them with coping strategies to reduce dependency and potential harm.

Harm minimisation strategies, such as the distribution of drug testing kits and providing safe spaces for substance use, are also vital. Drug testing kits allow students to check the purity and safety of substances, reducing the risk of overdose or poisoning.

Safe spaces for substance use, supervised by trained professionals, can significantly lower the risk of harm

by providing immediate assistance in case of an adverse reaction.

Implementing drug and alcohol harm reduction measures not only protects individual students but also enhances the overall safety and well-being of the campus community.

By focusing on minimising the adverse effects of substance use through education, support services, and harm minimisation strategies, we can reduce the burden on emergency services, lower the incidence of substance-related health issues, and create a supportive environment where students can seek help without fear of stigma or punishment.

Investing in these programmes is crucial for fostering a healthier, more informed, and resilient student body, ultimately benefiting the broader community and contributing to the overall well-being of our society.

## Our Proposals

- Establish a Drug Liaison Nurse specific to Students in every HEI - €3m
- A student focused Alcohol Liaison Nurse in every HEI - €3m

# Students as Workers & on Placements

**With the increased cost of living and financial burdens being placed on students to fund their education, more and more are turning to working full time jobs along with their studies.**

This can have a mental drain on students and their education is put on the back burner as they try to afford attending Higher education. While free fees and affordable accommodation will alleviate this issue, we need policies in place to immediately help students.

An increasing number of courses involve a compulsory component of practical placement, for which students incur additional and sometimes hidden costs.

Such costs may cover equipment, additional commutes and even accommodation if a placement involves the temporary relocation of the student. Students with compulsory placement components are not supported financially to fulfil this component of their course, and in most cases, such funding is also not provided by the HEI.

Placement is a form of work, whether it is classified as a form of 'learning on the job' or a learning component. Students working through placement are often a fundamental support to the sectors they work in, such as role of student nurses as part of the effort to combat COVID-19.

Additionally, students on placement have additional obligations as a result of blurring the lines between education and work, and must be fairly compensated.

Students enrolled in courses that have placement aspect suffer additional costs because of the requirement to undertake placement due to additional equipment, the need to relocate for certain rotations of placement and, in some cases, foregoing income they would have otherwise made.

## Our Proposals

- Implementing €500 maintenance grants for students on mandatory placement – Costing request made to DFHERIS was not fulfilled.
- The payment of living wage to all students engaged in placement as part of their study.
- That USC is completely and finally scrapped as promised nearly a decade ago by Fine Gael
- The implementation of a living wage in place of a minimum wage
- The removal of sub-minimum wages for those workers under 20

**While fees for undergraduate students qualifying for the ‘free fees initiative’ are the highest in the EU, international students pay up to twenty times that fee. Additionally, they face increased expenses such as residency permit renewal fees, language courses and the general costs of international relocation.**

The enrolment of international students in Irish HEI’s adds far more value than fees associated with their study, yet they are viewed as an alternative for core funding in the higher education sector and research and innovation.

Students and young people have lost confidence in this Government and in the leadership of this country. The aspiration of leaving the country to countries where the values of welfare, redistribution and equality are truly embedded in policy. Under the current residency requirements needed for eligibility for EU fee rates, it is constantly made harder for those who wish to return to Ireland for education.

International students on Stamp 2 are required to renew their permission to remain in the state every year.

The renewal costs students €300 per year. The purpose

of the renewal is updating any personal information that might have changed over the year, and to prove that the student is still enrolled in their course and is progressing as intended.

This information can be obtained from HEIs directly, and a digital mechanism for updating personal information can be provided to relieve students of the difficult process and the costs associated with it. These students also need to apply for private insurance which is another cost on an already extremely costly process

## Our Proposals

- Granting Stamp 2 residency permits for the entire length of the course, eliminating the yearly charge of €300 – No Cost to Exchequer.
- Stamp 2 is classed as reckonable residency – No cost to Exchequer
- The removal of provisions relating to the maximum restriction for international students to work while they are on their student visa – No Cost to Exchequer.
- The establishment of student support in collaboration with HEIs fund specifically to provide financial supports to international students in relation to registering and renewing their permission to remain in the State (student visa).
- Expanding the Student Assistance Fund allowing international students to avail of these supports – Costing requested from DFHERIS was not fulfilled



# Universal Design Learning

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework aiming to optimize teaching and learning through flexible and inclusive approaches to accommodate the diverse needs of students.**

While Education for All seeks to tackle financial barriers, physical barriers to education still remain for many students. In USI's experience, many students wish for a mix of in-person and online teaching.

This is seen with just shy of a quarter of students either fairly or totally unsatisfied of the availability of recorded lectures. Yet, despite the large number of HEIs that claim to be UDL compliant, there is a lack of information on how many staff are trained and have UDL badges.

Further, many lecture halls, classrooms and resources are still not available in hybrid format leaving students who might not be able to attend classes in person at a disadvantage. Students stand in solidarity with their teachers, and USI-AMLÉ believes that staff working conditions are student learning conditions.

Investment in UDL to increase access to education through allowing more flexible modes of teaching shall not come at disadvantage to staff, and the work they produce in the context of teaching towards hybrid education.

## Our Proposals

- The expansion and continuation of the device lending scheme - €25 million.
- Increased investment in the digital infrastructure to allow for hybrid learning and teaching - €5 million.
- Ensuring that staff compensation and working conditions are not negatively impacted by the move towards hybrid education.

# Apprenticeships

**Apprenticeships are another pathway into further training to have a trade rather than going to college. The recent trend towards less traditional forms of education, and the expansion of options available for third-level education is welcomed by USI-AMLÉ.**

However, the current systems underpinning access to apprenticeships has gradually moved to become more exclusive and lacks the required State supports to truly make it accessible to students. Apprenticeship education, like other forms of education in the State, must be fully publicly provided and access to education must not be dictated by the financial ability of students

## Our Proposals

- The removal of apprenticeship registration fees - €11.39 Million.
- Increase the income that apprentices receive and increase fuel and accommodation allowances for apprentices in line with the real costs of fuel and accommodation.

## Students are increasingly concerned about high student costs from e-book licensing.

Dominant multinational publishers have significantly increased license fees, imposing undue financial strain on our libraries, institutions, and the taxpayer, while inadequately compensating authors.

Libraries face stringent restrictions on e-book usage, such as limitations on simultaneous views, and unlike print books, they can only license e-books, not purchase them.

This licensing model forces libraries to comply with publisher-imposed restrictions, limiting their collection development and access to non-English titles or specific user groups. The #ebooksos campaign, initiated in the UK and now gaining traction in Ireland, underscores the inequitable practices of these publishers.

A glaring example is the exorbitant pricing of e-books for academic use, with some e-books costing up to twenty times their print counterparts. By August 2023, the campaign's open letter has garnered support from over 5,000 individuals,

including the Library Association of Ireland.

USI-AMLÉ supports the calls of the campaign and asks for budgetary and legislative reforms to that effect. In the previous year, higher education and public libraries expended over €3 million on e-books.

## The disparity in e-book and print costs.

Additionally, students in certain courses are required to purchase physical copies of books that might not be provided in an e-book format, in such case the cost is directly incurred by the student

## Our Proposals

- Doubling the funding provided to IReL for providing access to more e-books through transformative agreements and making students aware of the service - €5.5m.
- The provision of a textbook subsidy for the benefit of students that are projected to incur textbook costs of more than €50 per academic year.
- Increased funding for Open Education Resources (OER) and the associated curation infrastructure to ensure sustainable access - approx. €1.25m.
- Increased transparency and sustainability in e-book costs and licensing - No Cost to Exchequer.
- To advocate for copyright law reform to remove the requirement for libraries to purchase versions of e-books licensed specifically for library use which are subject to the aforementioned pricing and licensing obstacles.
- Allow libraries to scan whole books they own in print where e-books are unavailable or unaffordable for preservation and for controlled access to support research and learning.

# Student Assistance Fund

**Whilst the negative impact of the student contribution fee on students' financial well-being and access to education has been significant, we must also tackle the hidden costs associated with education.**

Hidden additional costs serve as a further reminder of the marketized Higher Education system that students across the island are being subjected to and may further inhibit students from progressing in their education particularly where these costs are mandatory. Additionally, the Student Grant, although in need of certain reforms, provides some relief for the most financially vulnerable students.

Yet, the hidden costs that arise in various contexts remain a major driver of the costs of being a student. The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) which provides some assistance to students in areas that are not covered by the grant attempts to deal with various

hidden costs.

Funding for the Student Assistance Fund must remain at post-pandemic levels to mitigate the effects of the cost of living on students. While the SAF provides relief to students, reducing hidden costs through core funding remains needed.

Multiple cohorts, including international students, do not qualify for the SAF, and USI-AMLÉ's position is that the fund should be extended to all students in need of such support, regardless of their tuition status.

Once-off top ups to the SAF provide no stability to the sector or to the students that will undoubtedly need to access the fund. Core funding, base-lined at post-pandemic levels, is required to ensure that students facing hidden costs and other increased financial burdens.

## Our Proposals

- Continued annual funding for the SAF at post pandemic levels, considering the rate of inflation - €25m.
- Ensuring the eligibility of all students for accessing the SAF by enforcing a standardized approach for all HEIs when assessing requests to access funds from the SAF.

# Students as Asylum Seekers

**Students who are seeking asylum and refuge in Ireland, who also wish to continue their third level education automatically find themselves at a disadvantage due to the residency requirement associated with qualifying for the Free Fees Initiative.**

USI-AMLÉ believes that the criteria of the Free-Fees Initiative should reflect a set of mitigating measures that places asylum seekers and refugees on a more equal ground when accessing third-level education in Ireland. Additionally, HEIs often lack the capacity to facilitate the education of refugees and asylum seekers

## Our Proposals

- Fund HEIs to increase their capacity for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Removing the residency criteria from the Free Fees Initiative for Asylum Seekers.



**The Student Grant, administered by SUSI, needs immediate reform to reflect its goal of an equitable, publicly funded model for higher education, ensuring access to the most financially vulnerable and breaking the cycle of poverty. Whilst the grant has helped many students access higher education there needs to be drastic changes in the way it is operated and the level of grants.**

Holiday Earnings are defined as income earned from employment outside term time, but within the previous calendar year or reference period by an applicant who was in education. For a student to qualify or retain their eligibility for the Student Grant without risking losing any or all the supports they receive, they are limited to earnings of up to €6,552 during their holidays.

Not only is this figure not remotely attached to the reality of the cost of living, but it is also in principle counterintuitive and limiting. Along with working outside of term time the average student is working alongside their degree to be able to afford being a student and this should not be the case. A student should not be expected to skip lectures to work to be able to afford basic necessities.

The Maintenance Grant is the only permanent measure dedicated to putting money back in the pockets of students. Additionally, the Maintenance Grant allows students to use supports in the way they need to use it, including covering hidden costs

associated with third-level education in the absence of adequate funding for hidden costs as previously outlined.

A major reform of the supports under the Grant has been called upon for years, and introducing in such a way is one step closer to both alleviating current and future pressures on the most financially vulnerable students and ensuring access to our Higher Education system in the future.

SUSI requires all supporting documents submitted when applying for the Grant to be in either English or Irish. For example, birth certificates, evidence of nationality, and evidence of parental separation. Any documentation in languages other than English/Irish must be accompanied by an official English translation.

The current support brackets for number of dependent children do not reflect the increased costs every family has had to incur over the past years. This mechanism is in place to adequately assess the true cost of dependent children may have on a household when looking to qualify for the grant.

Current Model	Proposal
Fewer than 4	Up to 2
4 -7	3-5
8 or more	6 or more

## Our Proposals

- Increasing holiday earnings eligible for deduction from reckonable income by doubling the current limit to make it €13,104 – approx. €34m.
- SUSI to provide a dedicated translation service for students and their documentation or cover the cost of such translation - Costing request made to DFHERIS returned unfulfilled.
- From the Options Paper 2023, USI-AMLÉ would ask for Option 4 - the Combined Maintenance and Threshold. USI-AMLÉ contends this approach is by far the most proportional and sustainable. - €119.8m
- Amend the dependent bracket for SUSI - €14m
- The extension of the SUSI grant to online students

# Lifelong Learning

**USI-AMLÉ recognises the immense value of lifelong learning for Irish society, seeing it as a key driver of personal and professional development. By promoting continuous education, Ireland can foster a more adaptable workforce, better equipped to meet the demands of a changing global economy.**

Lifelong learning also enhances employability and innovation, ensuring Ireland remains competitive while offering individuals the opportunity to pursue their passions and achieve personal fulfilment.

Beyond the economic benefits, lifelong learning contributes to social cohesion and well-being. USI-AMLÉ views it as essential for encouraging active citizenship and community involvement, helping to bridge generational and cultural divides. It also supports mental health by keeping minds engaged, reducing cognitive decline, and enhancing overall life satisfaction, ultimately enriching both individuals and society as a whole.

Ireland's lifelong learning participant rate is 11.8% (Eurostat, 2022). This is below the EU 2020 lifelong learning target of 15% (SOLAS, May 2022).

In Quarter 4, 2021, 70% of participants in lifelong learning held Third-Level qualifications. Compared to Quarter 4 2019, in Quarter 4 2021 the number of lifelong learning participants declined across each NFQ level group.

The lower the NFQ level, however, the stronger the decline. In 2020, there was a 26% drop in the

participation of adults in education/training in Ireland (OECD, 2021a), 50% drop in the lifelong learning participation rate for people with lower secondary education (in Q4 2020 compared to Q4 2019, SOLAS, 2021a), 49% drop in accreditation awards at NFQ Levels 1-4 compared to 2019 (SOLAS, 2021a).

The above figures, from AONTAS, highlight that there is a pressing need, not just to increase Ireland's lifelong learning participation rate, but to focus particularly on those who are less qualified and have faced social, economic and educational inequality and disadvantage

## Our Proposals

- Back to Education payments should be available to all part-time workers/learners.
- Ensure affordable childcare is accessible to any learner who needs it by providing funding to ETBs and Higher Education Institutions to develop onsite childcare facilities and by providing higher rates of childcare subsidy to a broader range of FE and HE learners
- To increase the back to education allowance by 10% - €3.1m



**Given the rising costs of living and increasing tuition fees, enhanced financial support and transparency in funding are urgently needed to create a supportive environment for postgraduate students. This is essential for the future of Ireland's education system and its research and innovation sectors.**

Despite recent updates from SUSI for 2024/25 academic year, there is a pressing need for more substantial action to address the financial strain on postgraduate students.

Although SUSI has reintroduced maintenance grants of up to €2,384 annually and increased income thresholds for eligibility, these measures fall short in the face of rising fees at (HEIs), rampant inflation, and the escalating cost of living. In the current economic climate, these adjustments are insufficient to meet the true financial needs of students.

The government's recent efforts to alleviate student financial burdens fall short, focusing mainly on undergraduate fees while largely ignoring postgraduate students. As HEIs continue to exploit fee increases as a revenue stream, the government's failure to act decisively only exacerbates the commercialization of education, directly contradicting the principles of accessibility and equity that should underpin our education system.

The disparity in stipends for PhD students remains a significant issue. While the government has introduced the Innovate for Ireland scheme, offering a €28,000 annual stipend for up to 400 new PhD candidates tackling key challenges, this has fueled greater disparity in stipends and treatment across the PhD population.

With enrolments having increased 26% from 2016 to the 2022/23 academic year, more needs to be done to ensure that all PhD students are receiving a fair stipend. The current system and improvements made by the government leaves a larger gap for students who are either self-funded or funded at much lower rates from HEIs and external bodies. If the government is serious about addressing PhD stipends, it needs to implement comprehensive and equitable changes for all, supporting HEIs to pay higher and more stipends to match the current situation of higher enrolments and changing government-led funding schemes.

The Irish Universities Association (IUA) reported a significant economic return on investment in higher education, with a €1 billion government investment yielding an €8.9 billion return annually. If the government invests €222.26 million to elevate all PGR stipends to €28,000, the projected economic return could reach €1.9 billion, reinforcing the value of investing in education and research.

## Our Proposals

- Introduce a minimum stipend of €25,000 for all postgraduate researchers - €75m
- Place a cap on postgraduate fees of €3000 - No Cost Provided
- Allow part-time postgraduate students to avail of SUSI - No cost provided
- Allow international students to avail of supports from SUSI - No cost provided



**Irish is the national language of our country, yet it is consistently underfunded and overlooked in every budget. We are a proud nation with a deep connection to our language, but without significant investment, we risk losing the richness of Irish as it once was. Serious funding is essential to restore and revitalize our national language.**

Raidió Rí-Rá is run entirely through Irish and targets young people aged 5-35 by playing chart music. While they occasionally broadcast on FM during events like Seachtain na Gaeilge, Raidió Rí-Rá is currently available only online through their website, app, and the TuneIn app.

Despite their efforts to secure a full national FM license, they have been unsuccessful due to insufficient funding. Adequate funding is crucial to support Raidió Rí-Rá's goal of broadcasting on FM. Similarly, TG4 operates on half the budget of S4C in Wales. Although TG4's budget has increased over the last three years, further investment is necessary.

Foras na Gaeilge provides funding to Irish language organizations, community groups, and other entities outside of the Gaeltacht to strengthen the Irish language.

Over the last 20 years, its budget has significantly decreased compared to the Arts Council's budget. Since 2021, the Arts Council has received eight times more funding than Foras na Gaeilge. This disparity negatively impacts current and future projects,

including the cross-border initiatives, which suffer from underfunding from both governments.

Prior to 2016, Údarás na Gaeltachta's funding was cut. Although they have received some additional funding since then, its responsibilities have also increased without corresponding resources such as the new policies and legislation from both governments, North and South, which require proper implementation, but the organization lacks the necessary funding and resources to do so.

In Budget 2020, the grant for the mandatory 'Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht' was reinstated for student teachers in public colleges, but not for those in private colleges.

This grant should be extended to private colleges, such as Hibernia, and travel costs should be covered for all students, as currently, only students in public colleges who are able to avail of SUSI have their travel costs to and from the Gaeltacht covered.



## Our Proposals

- Funding for Raidió Rí-Rá to secure an FM license - €1.2m
- Increased funding for TG4 - €26m
- Match Foras na Gaeilge's funding to that of the Arts Council, starting at - €14.5m
- Full subsidy for TEG exams required for certain courses - €500k
- Increased funding for Údarás na Gaeltachta - €16.5m
- Full state funding for the mandatory 'Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht' for all student teachers, including those in private colleges - €2.8m
- Increased investment in third-level courses to support language planning - €1m

**While it is welcomed that certain education boards have received free period products, there is still a large social inequality for students around the island who cannot afford period products.**

Period products are a necessity, and they should not be paid for.

Some students miss classes due to their periods, and some students even spend their income on other necessities such as food rather than period products due to food being almost cheaper than period products in the current cost-of-living crisis.

Period products are a necessity, just like soap and toilet paper, and should be accessible in most bathrooms across HEIs. In this rollout we also ask for suitable, smaller dispensers to be provided in accessible, men's and gender-neutral toilets to ensure all students' menstrual needs are met.

In 2024, it is about time that students are not held back because of their periods. Free period products have been piloted in certain education boards. Third level education was meant to receive it from the HSE but has not been publicly visible.

There has been a significant increase of students coming through DARE on the CAO. Last year we had 9,913 apply to CAO through the DARE scheme. That means 14% of students out of the 78,025 students who applied last year are eligible for the FSD. Since COVID-19, we've seen a rise of students applying

through the DARE scheme, particularly around their mental health. With more people getting accepted, there needs to be more funding towards the supports for these students.

Some Student Unions have developed a T-Fund which is used to cover costs of social changes such as clothes, makeup, binders for chests, etc. It can also be used to help change someone's name for their Gender Recognition Cert or Deedpoll. Students' Unions should not be covering the cost for students.

For years they have done the same for period products and now there are free period products being provided to colleges.

The implementation of a government funded T-Fund for trans and non-binary students will allow for more trans and non-binary students to be able to express themselves the way they want to in college and not have to struggle at the start of their transition with the issues as outlined by LGBT Ireland when they carried out a study on 'Mental health and well-being of LGBTI people'.

The timeframe of disability social welfare audits does not coincide with Revenue's annual assessment, and the criteria of assessment also differ. This brings about inaccurate assessment, resulting in an unfair adjustment of supports.

## Our Proposals

- Additional €1 million for period products to be distributed to all colleges.
- Additional €1 million for the Fund for Students with Disabilities to accommodate the increase in students applying for the DARE scheme.
- A government funded T-fund to be established for all colleges. - €50k per HEI to begin with and review after one year
- Remove the mandatory 3 month change of income reporting to Blind Pension/ Disability Allowance for self-employed people and replace it with annual return of revenue assessment. This would be consistent with supporting self-employment
- To increase the back to education allowance by 10% - €3.1m

# Uncosted Proposals

**In preparation for this document, USI this year submitted over 60 questions to relevant departments seeking information on hypothetical costs. Many questions related to costings we had previously had from government, so we were disappointed to see so many come back this year unanswered with no costings.**

In the interests of openness, we publish here the questions we asked which received no response.

1. What is the cost to introduce free public transport for all students
2. What is the cost to introduce SUSI for those wishing to study postgraduate degrees on a part-time basis
3. What is the cost of immediately introducing a living wage in place of a minimum wage
4. What is the cost in restoring the adjacency grant rate to 24km rather than the current 30km
5. What is the cost for SUSI to introduce a dedicated translation service for students and their documentation
6. What is the cost of expanding the student assistance fund to allow international students to avail of it
7. What is the cost of subsidising dental practices to allow students to avail of dental check-ups every 6 months
8. What is the cost for establishing a fund aimed at supporting students who wish to attend courses in the Gaeltacht such as scholarships and subsidising the cost.
9. What is the cost for Investment for courses to have a minimum of one module taught through Irish in all third level education.
10. What is the cost of fully subsidising GEM courses
11. What is the cost of a provision of a textbook subsidy for the benefit of students that are projected to incur textbook costs of more than €50 per academic year.
12. What is the cost of Funding to purchase a full Adobe Suite of software for creative students - €1.2 million.
13. What is the cost in introducing a living wage for all apprentices
14. What is the cost in abolishing apprenticeship registration fees
15. What is the cost for The Government to make available emergency accommodation at the beginning of each academic year for students who are due to commence their education without securing accommodation for the first 6-weeks of term.
16. What is the cost in creating a North/South Mobility Creation of a central website for studying cross border
17. What is the cost of increasing the maximum amount available for postgraduate tuition grant to become €8,000 per year
18. What is the cost of increasing the SUSI maintenance grant in line with national inflation
19. What is the cost in paying a living wage to all students engaging with mandatory placement as part of their study
20. What is the cost in providing students on SUSI who partake in mandatory placement an additional maintenance grant of €500 a month
21. What is the cost for Full state funding for the mandatory 'Tréimhse Foghlama sa Ghaeltacht' for all student teachers, including public and private colleges.
22. What is the cost for increased investment into the amount of third level courses taught through Irish throughout the country so that students have a better chance of maintaining their Irish and being able to work in various sectors through Irish in the future such as the public sector
23. What is the cost to Get Raidió Rí-Rá on FM full-time.
24. What is the cost to fully fund the provision of 30,000 student beds to bridge the gap in student accommodation
25. What is the cost for introducing open access to journal articles for students
26. What is the cost in introducing a T-Fund for all HEIs
27. What is the cost in introducing an E-Book scheme to all HEIs allowing students to avail of these
28. What is the cost with abolishing the holiday earnings for SUSI
29. What is the cost for introducing Susi to students studying fully online courses and those studying micro-credentials



30. What is the cost for funding TEG exams for all third level courses where it is required and subsidising the exam for other third level students? Is there a plan to recognise and use official certifications, such as the European Certificate of Irish (TEG) or equivalent qualifications, in third-level exams?
31. What is the cost of Increasing the income threshold for the special rate to €50k and removing provision setting out the requirement of receiving relief from the Department of Social Protection
32. What is the cost for allowing anyone over the age of 18 can be eligible to be assessed as an independent student if they meet all other criteria in SUSI
33. What is the cost That SUSI grant support be extended beyond the list of approved institutions and courses – eg. There are currently 9 HEIs offering courses through the CAO system that are not eligible for SUSI grants.
34. What is the cost to bring the number of counsellors to 1;1000 in every HEI
35. What is the cost to allow HEIs to receive funding specifically to be used to develop and enhance support services for students coming from the Gaeltacht or Irish medium education to third level?
36. What is the cost to change the reckonable income in SUSI from Gross income to net income
37. What is the cost to introduce A national financial aid fund to support International Students.
38. What is the cost to introduce student health centers in every HEI that does not have them and to fully staff and fund those which are already present
39. What would the cost be to extend SUSI criteria to those who require repeating a year
40. What is the cost to completely abolish student contribution charge
41. What is the cost to expand the free HIV rapid testing and PrEP to within HEIs, ensuring students access to such services on-campus.
42. What is the cost to Extend the Fee Grant to students studying outside of the state
43. What is the cost That the residency criteria be removed to enable access to SUSI for returning immigrants, asylum seekers, migrants, those who are undocumented and those in direct provision.
44. What is the cost to abolish all postgraduate fees
45. What is the cost to cap postgraduate fees to the same as undergraduate (€3000)
46. How much would it cost for SUSI to cover 100% fees for postgraduates
47. What is the cost of getting the #Gaeilge4all policy on Irish in the education system from pre-school up to third level developed and implemented?
48. What is the cost of immediately raising sub-minimum pay for under 20s to minimum wage
49. What is the cost for enabling student health facilities to prescribe hormones and offer blood tests to Trans and Non-Binary Students

# USI Coiste Gnó 2024-2025

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Vice President for Academic Affairs	Bryan O'Mahony
Vice President for Welfare	Niamh Doherty
Vice President for Campaigns	Nathan Murphy
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This submission was edited by Nathan Murphy, USI VP for Campaigns.

The Editor 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.







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