



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

STUDENT MANIFESTO





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Foreword

from the president

As we approach the upcoming general election, students across the country are facing challenges that cannot be ignored. The student movement has always been about making our voices heard, and this manifesto is our way of standing up for the issues that matter most to us.

One of the biggest concerns for students right now is accommodation. It's becoming harder and harder to find affordable and safe places to live while studying. Many students are struggling, and this needs to change. We're calling on the next government to prioritize building more student accommodation and making it affordable for everyone.

Finally, we welcome the recent €1,000 reduction in student fees, but it's just a temporary step. What we need is a long-term plan to abolish fees entirely over the next few years. Education should be free and accessible to all, not a financial burden. This temporary reduction must be made permanent and expanded further to truly support students.

Another key issue is trans healthcare. Every student deserves access to the care they need, and right now, trans students are facing long waits and barriers in accessing basic healthcare services. This isn't right, and we're asking for a better, more inclusive healthcare system that works for everyone.

This manifesto is about building a better future for all students. Together, we can push for real change in this election and beyond.





HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

Purpose-Built Student Accommodation

The lack of availability of student accommodation is the biggest issue facing students currently, particularly as the number of students pursuing higher education continues to rise. With limited housing options, many students are finding it increasingly difficult to secure affordable and appropriate accommodation near their colleges and universities. Purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) is in short supply, leading to intense competition for available spaces, while the private rental market is becoming more expensive due to the high demand and limited availability. The lack of sufficient student housing has forced many students into long-distance commuting and precarious living arrangements, which adds time, cost, and stress to their daily lives, affecting their ability to fully engage in academic and social activities.

This shortage of student accommodation is not only disrupting students' day-to-day lives but is also contributing

to broader mental health issues. The stress of securing a place to live, combined with financial burdens caused by high rental prices, has left many students feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Some have resorted to extreme measures, such as sleeping in cars or couch surfing, which further exacerbates the instability of their living conditions. This instability is negatively impacting students' academic performance and college experience, as they struggle to focus on their studies while facing uncertainty about their living situation. Without significant intervention, the availability of student accommodation in Ireland is likely to remain a critical challenge.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to evaluate the student accommodation crisis and to bring real tangible ideas on how to solve the crisis, including a new strategic plan and commitment to build the shortfall of beds.**

Digs

Most students used to view digs as a last resort. However, due to the ongoing student accommodation crisis, digs are becoming the only option for students. This is because private PBSA is unaffordable and on-campus accommodation is limited.

These students who enter digs experience precarious situations as they lack any legal protections. Homeowners

can evict them with just one hour's notice and deny them privacy rights. This is often done by not allowing them to lock their doors or restricting access to facilities. Students should not have to be concerned about the possibility of being evicted that same day and should have peace of mind.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to pass legislation to protect those who enter digs.**

TU Borrowing Policy

There needs to be a significant increase in the building for on-campus PBSA and there needs to be the ability for every HEI to draw funding to build. The government's refusal to allow technological universities (TUs) to borrow money has been a total failure. TUs cannot borrow money for construction, so students are forced to turn to the private market, resulting in exorbitant accommodation costs or long commutes.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to change legislation to allow TUs to borrow money to facilitate the building and purchasing of student accommodation.**

Affordable Student Housing

All levels of society, including students, have been impacted by the housing crisis and its knock-on effects. Accommodation prices have skyrocketed in recent years, and although Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) are assisting in controlling the price surge, most student accommodation is still excessively expensive. Comments have been made by the current government regarding new commencements of student accommodation, stating that a proportion of the rooms will be

affordable. However, they have not specified the price range for what is considered affordable. For students, affordability can vary and there needs to be a feasible price set in place.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to introduce a rent cap on student accommodation to make it affordable for all students, setting this at one third of the minimum wage.**

Vacant Property Tax

According to the 2022 census, over 160,000 properties in Ireland are vacant. These properties could create a significant number of homes, which would clear the housing lists and house our growing homeless population. The Vacant Property Tax is only three times the local property tax, meaning that these properties are lying vacant and there is tax being collected as low as €270 a year. If we are serious about solving the housing crisis, renovating these vacant properties is a way

of alleviating the shortage of housing with no need to build from scratch.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to increase the Vacant Property Tax so that these buildings stop lying dormant and can be used to house people in need of homes.**

Free Public Transport

Because of the ongoing student housing crisis, an increasing number of students are forced to endure lengthy commutes to college. Some students are spending over 4 hours a day commuting to attend their lectures, which raises concerns about public transportation. Students can shell out more than €600 a month solely on public transport. To ease the financial burden on students and enhance their college experience, the government should provide free public transportation. The notion that students would make “unnecessary trips” is inaccurate, as students simply want to commute to and from college. With the reliability of transport lacking in recent years

with delays, cancellations and buses that disappear, this can leave students stranded with no way of getting home. More 24-hour buses should be introduced so that students are not stressed about missing the last bus and with these buses there must be a dedicated police force to stop any anti-social behaviour.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to introduce free public transport for students and to increase the supply of 24-hour bus routes.**

Social and Affordable Homes for All

Social housing plays a crucial role in providing affordable, stable homes for low-income individuals and families who cannot afford housing through the private rental market. It is an essential safety net that helps prevent homelessness and reduces housing insecurity, offering people a secure place to live while allowing them to allocate their limited resources toward other basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare. As we are experiencing a significant housing crisis, the demand for social housing has skyrocketed, leaving many people on lengthy waiting lists. The lack of affordable housing has led to increased homelessness and financial strain on families, exacerbating poverty and inequality.

Addressing the housing crisis must include prioritising the construction of social housing. While there have been recent

efforts, the development pace has not met the growing demand for social housing. By building more social housing, we can provide long-term stability for thousands of people and ensure that the vulnerable are not left behind. Investing in social housing can reduce the financial burden on emergency services, shelters, and temporary accommodation, leading to more efficient use of public funds. Expanding social housing will also help stabilise the rental market by alleviating pressure on private housing demand, leading to more affordable rents for everyone.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to significantly increase the supply of social and affordable homes.**

Student Co-Operative Living

Student co-op living is a housing model where students collectively manage and maintain their accommodation, sharing responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and decision-making in a co-operative, non-profit environment. In this system, students pay lower rent than in traditional housing options because the costs are based on the actual expenses of running the co-op rather than on market-driven prices or landlord profits. Co-ops promote a sense of community, encouraging collaboration and a shared sense of responsibility among residents. By pooling resources, students can create a more affordable, inclusive, and self-sustaining living arrangement that fosters mutual support and enhances the overall college experience. This model has been successfully implemented in other countries such as Switzerland and the UK, providing a solution to housing shortages while also enabling students to actively engage in managing their own accommodation.

Student co-op living should be investigated by the next government as a viable solution to the ongoing student housing crisis. As rent continues to rise and purpose-built student accommodation remains insufficient, co-ops offer an affordable alternative that directly addresses the financial challenges faced by students. By supporting the development of student co-ops, the government can help ease pressure on the rental market, reduce the reliance on expensive private landlords, and provide students with more stable housing options. Additionally, student co-ops align with broader goals of sustainability and community-building, promoting environmentally conscious living and reducing the social isolation that students often face.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to invest in student co-ops as a viable alternative for student housing and ensure that the Co-operative Societies Bill is passed**



**ACCESS TO
EDUCATION**

Abolish Fees

In Ireland, students face the highest fees for higher education in the European Union. These fees act as a significant barrier to education, forcing some to delay their studies and preventing others from accessing higher education. These fees impose long-term financial challenges for students and their families, especially in families where more than one child is attending third level education. Besides this, the contribution fee can often discourage students from lower socio-economic backgrounds from pursuing third level education because of the financial barriers it poses. Between the cost of fees, accommodation and other expenses they will face in third-level education, many of these students are

being priced out of furthering their education. Those that do often have to take on part-time or even full-time work in order to make ends meet. This, overall, has a damaging effect on the academic performance and general wellbeing of the students as they try to balance college, work and personal life. We need to view education as a right, not a product to be sold or purchased.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to abolish third-level fees to provide equal access to education and reduce financial barriers, which may prevent many students from pursuing higher education.**

North/South Mobility

Students on both sides of the border face a severe lack of information regarding pursuing higher education outside of their jurisdiction and grade equivalencies. Many students in the Republic of Ireland have no knowledge of the UCAS system and feel lost when they start exploring the idea of accessing education in the North of Ireland. The same goes for students in the North when it comes to applying for the CAO and attending a southern institution. This lack of information and support in understanding how the two systems differ imposes a significant barrier to students' mobility on the island. In addition to this, the lack of funding for guidance counsellors is detrimental to their ability to pursue

education outside of their jurisdiction. The grading system also creates a disadvantage for students from the North, as one Leaving Certificate subject is considered two-thirds the value of an A-Level subject. This results in the devaluation of A-Level results compared to Leaving Certificate results.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to create a centralised website where students can access information surrounding institutions all over the island of Ireland, grade equivalencies, and the UCAS and CAO systems.**

SUSI Reform

SUSI has been used as a mechanism for supporting students in accessing third-level education, but it is becoming increasingly clear that it is outdated and in need of comprehensive reform. Although SUSI provides essential financial support, it is important to note that the current structure fails to address the ever-evolving needs of students, especially in the face of the current cost-of-living crisis and the continuous rise in inflation. The current rates of maintenance grants are shockingly insufficient, covering only a mere fraction of expenses faced by students such as accommodation, the cost of which has skyrocketed in recent years. These financial shortfalls are making it increasingly difficult for students to pursue higher education and leave those that do struggling to make ends meet.

One of the most pressing issues with the SUSI system is the lack of appropriate provisions for estranged and independent students, a cohort who face complex barriers when seeking financial support from SUSI. These students who may have no contact or support from their parents because of relationship breakdowns are expected to provide detailed evidence of their estrangement, which often can be an invasive, complex and distressing ordeal. The system also fails to accommodate online and part-time postgraduate

students, excluding them from the benefits of SUSI in the face of the growing demand for more flexible study options. This process often results in the denied or delayed access to essential financial aid, leaving such students in a vulnerable position regarding pursuing their education.

Besides this, the criteria for students to qualify as independent is strict and often results in them being unfairly assessed based on their parents' income, even though they do not receive any financial support from them.

Furthermore, it is crucial that the financial support given by SUSI accurately reflects the cost of living, including the rising fees for postgraduate study. If this adjustment is not to be made, many students will continue to face financial difficulties, which will impede their academic success and future prospects. As educational expenses continue to grow, so must the financial support available to students, particularly as postgraduate fees increase annually.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to complete a full reform of SUSI and find solutions to the current issues and inconsistencies that are in place.**

Stipend for all PhD Students

PhD students play a crucial role in advancing Ireland's research output and raising the standard of academic work across the island. However, there is a clear disparity between those receiving government-backed stipends and those relying on funding from companies, higher education institutions (HEIs), external sources, or even self-funding. This inequality is particularly concerning given the rising cost of living, which affects all students.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to establish a minimum stipend of €28,000 for all PhD students, ensuring equity across the sector and recognising the essential work PhD researchers do for Ireland's academic and research landscape and continue to increase the stipend to be in line with minimum wage.**

Postgraduate Fees

The constant annual increase in postgraduate fees is creating further financial and social barriers for students to accessing postgraduate education. This undermines Ireland's commitment and mission to equality in education. Many talented students are being priced out of college, unable to continue their academic journey because of financial barriers.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to abolish postgraduate fees to ensure equal access to higher education for all.**

International Postgraduate Students

Ireland has become one of the most expensive countries for international students to pursue postgraduate education, with both EU and non-EU students facing steep fees. This financial burden discourages international talent from studying here, which could otherwise enrich Ireland's academic and cultural landscape.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to abolish international postgraduate fees, making Ireland a more accessible and attractive destination for global students.**

International PhD (IRP)

International students studying in Ireland encounter considerable financial challenges, not just with tuition fees, but also with the expensive costs of visas and the Irish Residency Permit. These expenses place an additional burden on students already struggling with the cost of living, making Ireland a less attractive destination for international scholars.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to cover the cost of the Irish Residency Permit for international students and provide further support in the visa application process, ensuring Ireland remains a welcoming place for global talent.**

Payment towards placement costs

For many courses, placement is a mandatory component of the degree. This can lead to significant additional costs for students, including the need to secure extra accommodation, purchase uniforms and cover travel expenses. In some cases, students may also face the pressure of balancing part-time jobs with unpaid placements, adding further strain. These

added expenses can become a financial burden, especially for those already managing fees and living costs.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to ensure that payments be made under SUSI for students that are attending placement as part of their degree.**

Commit to funding the gap

Delivering in full the *Funding the Future* commitment to close the €307m per annum gap in core funding that was identified and of which only 106m been increased. Filling this gap will allow universities to bring student-staff ratios into line with the EU27 average of 17:1, ending parity contracts and stop the tide of increasing master's and on campus accommodation fees.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to increase funding in education to match the average OECD countries spend the equivalent of 5.7% of GDP on education from early childhood to third level, as the 2021 figures show, Ireland spends just 2.8%.**

Apprentices

One of the key barriers preventing individuals from pursuing apprenticeships is the associated financial burden. Unlike traditional employment, apprenticeships often lack the guarantee of a minimum wage, which makes it difficult for apprentices to support themselves throughout the program. In many cases, apprentices are required to pay a pro rata registration fee for the education phase of their apprenticeship, adding an extra layer of financial strain. This fee, when combined with the costs of accommodation, transportation, and essential tools and equipment, creates multiple obstacles that can discourage potential apprentices from completing or even starting their training.

Accommodation is a particular challenge, as apprentices may need to relocate temporarily to be near training centres or workplaces, often without sufficient financial support. Travel expenses can also accumulate, particularly if apprentices must regularly commute long distances between their training

provider and employer. On top of this, apprentices are often responsible for purchasing their own tools and equipment, which can be expensive depending on the trade or industry they are training in.

These financial hurdles can be overwhelming, especially for those from lower-income backgrounds, leading many talented individuals to either drop out of their apprenticeships prematurely or avoid applying. Addressing these barriers is essential to creating a more accessible and inclusive apprenticeship system, ensuring that opportunities for skill development and career progression are available to everyone, regardless of their financial situation.

- **USI/AMLÉ urge the government to abolish pro rata registration fees and to ensure that apprentices are paid a living wage**

Hidden Costs


With the increasing cost of living in Ireland, the divide in equity of opportunity within education is growing. Beyond tuition fees, there are numerous hidden costs associated with a course that can place additional pressure on students and impact their academic performance. These costs can include essential items such as software, creative materials, and technology, which are often required to fully participate in coursework but are not always accounted for in initial program fees.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the government to encourage colleges to be more transparent about these additional costs and to ensure they are covered as part of the overall course fee and call for the creation of a dedicated Creative Fund. This fund would provide financial assistance to students in need, helping them access the necessary resources to engage in creative and technical work.**



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A photograph of three students from behind, walking up a set of stairs. The student in the center is a woman with long brown hair, wearing a tan ribbed sweater and blue jeans. To her right is a man with curly hair, wearing a dark hoodie and a dark backpack. To her left is another student, partially visible, wearing a dark jacket and a dark backpack. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a metal railing. The entire image has a teal color overlay.

**DEMOCRACY AND
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS**

Voter Reform

The proposal to lower the voting age to 16 in Ireland has sparked a debate on the need to engage younger citizens in the political process. Advocates argue that 16- and 17-year-olds are mature enough to understand and contribute to issues that directly affect them, such as education, climate change, and housing. Lowering the voting age would encourage political engagement early, fostering lifelong participation in democracy.

Critics, however, express concerns over whether young people at this age have the necessary life experience or political awareness to make informed decisions. With the likes of CSPE and the new politics and society subject, more and more young people are being educated in the political process and how politics works on the Island of Ireland.

Countries like Austria and Scotland have already introduced voting at 16, showing that it can lead to higher voter turnout and increased political literacy among youth. With less than 50% of those registered coming out to vote, the state had the lowest turnout for a local election in its history, showing the need to change the voting process to make it easier and more accessible.

Automatic voter registration is another reform that has gained attention in recent years. The current system requires citizens to register to vote, which can lead to a lower voter turnout because of administrative hurdles or a lack of awareness. Automatic registration would streamline the process by automatically enrolling eligible citizens when they become eligible to vote or when they update their personal information, such as through a driving license application or social services.

Proponents argue that this would lead to a more inclusive and representative electoral system, while critics worry about data privacy and the potential for inaccuracies. Both proposals aim to modernise Ireland's democratic practices and make voting more accessible for all citizens.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to change voting in Ireland, including lowering the voting age and introducing automatic registration.**

Palestine

We are currently watching the most documented genocide in human history. With the ongoing atrocities in Palestine, we are seeing deplorable actions being perpetrated by the state of Israel. The next government must take action to support the people of Palestine.

The Palestinian people are being subjected to unimaginable pain and suffering at the hand of Israel. It is crucial for the next government to commit to assisting the people of Palestine through real (impactful) action, such as ending military planes landing in Shannon Airport. Over the past several months, it has been observed that US planes that are providing military aid to Israel are utilising Shannon airport for stopovers and refueling. In order for Ireland to truly stand with the Palestinian people, this must end.

Another way in which the next government could support the Palestinian people would be in Implementing Boycott,

Divestment and Sanctions on Israeli products being sold in shops. In the 80s, similar action was taken against apartheid South Africa and led to the banning of the import of all South African goods, truly showing that Ireland does not stand with the oppressor. In addition to this, the Occupied Territories Bill must be enacted now to ban trading with and economic support of those occupying illegal settlements.

Students from Palestine should also be able to continue their studies under scholarships, similar to what was done for students fleeing Ukraine.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to fully support the people of Palestine in their struggles against the oppressive Israeli regime and implement supports for those fleeing the conflict.**

Decriminalisation of Drugs

As Ireland progresses into a new era, decisive action must be taken to decriminalise recreational drugs. The current prohibition is outdated, criminalising thousands each year for minor possession while burdening our justice system. Decriminalisation would reduce unnecessary prosecutions, free up valuable Garda resources, and give individuals a fair chance at employment, education, and housing without the stigma of a criminal record. This policy shift would not only modernise our laws but also focus on harm reduction and personal freedom.

By decriminalising recreational drugs, Ireland can put more funding into harm reduction programmes rather than putting those in prison. Countries like Portugal and several U.S. states have shown that decriminalisation leads to better public health outcomes, fewer social issues, and a reduction in drug-related harm. Now is the time for Ireland to adopt an evidence-based approach that prioritises safety, public health, and fairness for all.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to decriminalise recreational drugs for personal use.**

Give Us the Night!

Restrictions and government legislation have put pressure on Ireland's night-time economy, causing the closure of many venues. This has adversely affected the student experience, with many not being able to enjoy the social side of college due to costs and limited venues. Additionally, the lack of night-time safety initiatives from the government has left many students hesitant to engage with the night-time economy, as they do not feel safe in cities, towns, or venues. To tackle these problems, a comprehensive overhaul of

licensing laws, adjusting opening hours, and implementing safety measures is urgently required.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to commit to a complete overhaul of the current licensing laws, including abolishing the Special Exemption Order system, to be replaced with annual or monthly licenses.**

Dying with Dignity Bill

The Dying with Dignity Bill aligns with the values of personal autonomy and compassion. Terminally ill individuals would be given the option of assisted death under this bill, providing relief from prolonged suffering and a dignified choice in the face of inevitable decline. Terminal illness can cause great physical and emotional suffering that palliative care may not completely alleviate for some. By supporting this legislation, the government would give individuals the freedom to decide their own end-of-life care, respecting their right to bodily autonomy and their fate in the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

The bill aims to update Ireland's healthcare system by tackling an issue that has garnered global attention. Canada, Belgium,

and the Netherlands have proven that they can implement regulated assisted dying laws with proper safeguards. The safeguards guarantee that only those meeting strict criteria can access assisted dying, preventing abuse and respecting the rights of the suffering. By supporting the Dying with Dignity Bill, the government can provide compassionate choices for terminally ill citizens, reflecting a more humane and progressive approach to end-of-life care.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to support the Dying with Dignity Bill and to ensure that it passes into legislation in the next Dáil term.**

Seanad Reform

Seanad reform has been a long-debated issue, as the upper house of the Oireachtas, the Seanad has faced criticism for its perceived lack of democracy and limited powers. (Various) People often see the current composition of the Seanad as elitist, with a narrow electorate, which includes select university graduates and members of certain vocational panels elects most members. Various reports and proposals over the years have called for changes to its electoral system, such as broadening the electorate to include all citizens, enhancing its role in scrutinising legislation, and improving its function as a check on government power.

The defeat of the 2013 referendum to abolish the Seanad showed that while many citizens have concerns about its current structure, there is still support for maintaining an upper house in some form.

Earlier this year USI-AMLÉ made several suggestions to the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage for the Report on the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Seanad Electoral (University Members) (Amendment) Bill, 2024. We welcome the proposed changes to the university panel; however, we believe the Seanad should keep changing to enhance its democratic nature and accessibility.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to commit to a total Seanad reform to make it more democratic, including removing the 11 Taoiseach nominees and allowing all citizens to vote in the Seanad.**

Neutrality

Irish neutrality reflects our nation's commitment to peace, diplomacy, and independence in global affairs. A referendum on enshrining Ireland's neutrality in the Constitution must happen as a clear and democratic expression of the people's will. Ireland's long-standing tradition of military neutrality has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, promoting peace and diplomacy on the global stage. However, this policy is not constitutionally guaranteed, leaving it vulnerable to changing political landscapes or external pressures. By holding a referendum, Irish citizens formally decide on the future of neutrality, ensuring that this vital aspect of national identity is protected for generations to come.

In recent years, global tensions and the evolving nature of international alliances have brought renewed scrutiny to Ireland's neutral stance. While many Irish people strongly support neutrality, there remains uncertainty about its legal status and future direction. A referendum would not only clarify the nation's position but also reinforce Ireland's commitment to peace, non-alignment, and humanitarian efforts.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to hold a referendum on enshrining Irish neutrality in the Constitution.**



STUDENT WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

Living Wage

Many students are struggling to make ends meet because of low pay and subminimum wages, which disproportionately affect young people and those working part time. The disparity between the minimum wage and a living income prevents students from covering basic expenses, causing financial instability during their studies. Students who are under financial hardship are more likely to work long hours or incur debt, which has a negative influence on their academic

performance and wellbeing. To ensure that all students can afford to live while studying, wage improvements are required.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to remove sub-minimum wage rates and to set the minimum wage to the living wage.**

Mental Health Supports

Students' mental health has worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic, with rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues still hugely prevalent.

The existing funding framework for mental health services in higher education is insufficient, resulting in understaffed and under-funded counselling and healthcare services on campuses. This places a burden on the system due to a low counsellor-to-student ratio, which falls below international safety standards. As a result, students are left vulnerable without timely access to necessary mental health services.

A well-resourced and easily available mental health support system is crucial for students who experience challenges during their time in higher education. Without consistent, multi-year funding and an emphasis on lowering the counsellor-to-student ratio, the current system will continue to fail the students who need it the most.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to provide core multi-annual funding for student mental health services to increase the counsellor to student ratio to 1:1000.**

Supports for Students fleeing Conflict Zones

USI-AMLÉ desires Ireland to uphold its global reputation as 'the land of a hundred thousand welcomes' by treating asylum seekers and refugees who seek a better life with kindness. Access to third-level education for asylum seekers and refugees needs significant improvements. Ireland's education system is currently unfair and unequal for asylum seekers.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to increase scholarships at third-level for refugees in Ireland while also funding HEIs to increase their capacity for refugees and asylum seekers.**

Sexual Health

Students continue to face significant barriers in accessing essential healthcare services. International, ethnic minority, and LGBTQ+ students often struggle to find culturally competent care that meets their unique needs. Access to sexual health services is limited, leaving many students without the necessary resources for prevention and treatment. Expanding access to sexual health services,

including free contraception, STI testing, and sexual health education, is crucial in promoting student well-being.

- **USI-AMLÉ urges the next government to expand health services on campuses, including sexual health services.**

Period Poverty

Many students continue to experience period poverty, having to choose between purchasing essential health products and other necessities. This is an issue that disproportionately affects low-income students and undermines their ability to fully participate in their education. Anyone who requires period products should have them readily available in any

public space, ensuring no student is left without essential health products.

- **USI-AMLÉ urges the next government to end period poverty by providing free and accessible menstrual products.**

Supports for Ethnic Minority Students

Ethnic minority students often face unique challenges during their studies, such as cultural barriers, discrimination and racism, while also seeing a lack of representation in support services. The mental health and student support services rarely reflect the diversity of students' needs. It is vital that ethnic minority students have access to safe spaces and culturally relevant counsellors, just like students who request gender-specific counsellors.

- **USI-AMLÉ urges the next government to implement ethnic minority support groups across all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and provide culturally competent counselling services.**

Abortion Care

Although abortion care is legal in Ireland, there remains a significant lack of accessible supports, information, and service locations, particularly for students. Despite the legal framework now in place, many individuals, especially within the student population, continue to face challenges in obtaining timely and adequate abortion care. Access to services can be inconsistent, with some regions having few or no local providers, forcing students to travel long distances to receive care—a hurdle that is especially difficult for those without reliable transportation or the financial means to cover travel costs.

As many students are already struggling with the cost of living, making it harder for them to afford the additional expenses associated with healthcare services, including consultations, medications, and transportation. Furthermore, the emotional

toll of navigating an already challenging situation without adequate support can be overwhelming.

Without comprehensive and accessible support systems in place, students may delay seeking care, increasing the risk of medical complications and emotional distress. To ensure that students have the healthcare options they need, it is crucial to improve the availability of information, expand service locations, and provide financial and emotional support networks for those seeking abortion care.

- **USI-AMLÉ urges the next government to ensure full access to abortion services, including better information, expanded service locations, and financial and emotional supports to remove barriers for students seeking care.**

Transgender Healthcare

Transgender students often face significant financial barriers related to gender-affirming care, legal name changes, and mental health services, which are not always covered by traditional funding or health insurance. The financial strain and waiting time for affirmative care is having a serious strain on these students' mental health and wellbeing. USI/AMLÉ's vision is to witness a health system that is fit for purpose and capable of supporting students during and beyond their third-level education. Creating a trusted system is necessary to ensure that students receive quality healthcare with no doubt.

Transgender healthcare and Gender Affirming care in Ireland was ranked the worst in the EU among the 27 member states in October 2022. This ranking was provided by Transgender Europe (TGEU), a group funded by the EU, who campaigns

for the "complete demythologisation of trans and gender-diverse identities".

Establishing a T-fund would help ease these burdens, ensuring that all students have equal access to the resources they need to thrive academically and personally. Such a fund would be a tangible step toward supporting transgender students' well-being and fostering a more inclusive, supportive campus environment.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to overhaul the current trans healthcare model to align with the recommendations of TGEU and WPATH and to establish a T-Fund for every HEI**

**STUDENT
MANIFESTO**



GAEILGE

Third Level Courses

The Higher Education Authority reports that there were only 59 third-level courses taught through Irish or containing Irish as a subject in 2021/2022, with 1,779 students enrolled, which accounts for less than 1% of all third-level courses. In Wales, 25 years ago, only 3% of third-level courses were available in Welsh. Now, over 20% of their courses are in Welsh. The Government should implement a long-term plan to ensure that 20% of third-level courses are taught through Irish. In the next 5 years, the government should raise the percentage of Irish-language third-level courses to 5% and keep increasing it by 5% every 5 years until in twenty years' time when it is 20%. Many students from Irish-speaking backgrounds find transitioning to English-dominated third-

level education challenging. The government aims for 20% of the public sector to work through Irish by 2030, but this will be difficult without adequate third-level Irish-language courses.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to increase the percentage of Irish-language courses at third level to 5% within the next 5 years, to ensure the success of its 2030 goal of 20% of the public sector working through Irish. Without immediate action and long-term planning, the government's goals for the Irish language are at serious risk of failure.**

#Gaeilge4all

Only 8% of primary and 4% of post-primary students attend Irish-medium schools, despite these schools making up 8% and 10% of the total, respectively. The 2023 primary curriculum framework has reduced Irish teaching time by 30 minutes weekly, disadvantaging students later. There are no funds for increasing third-level Irish courses or for fulfilling language obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 & 2021. Northern Ireland also lacks protections for Gaeloideachas. A comprehensive policy should address these gaps. The Minister for Education should

begin a consultation process, which includes submissions to the NCCA, public meetings on aspects of the policy, and organising meetings with stakeholders from the Irish-language and education sectors and others as part of the consultation.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to address the gap by creating a comprehensive policy on Irish in the education system from preschool to third level as soon as its term begins.**

Scholarships to the Gaeltacht

The Gaeltacht provides a unique environment for immersion in the Irish language and culture. However, there are no national scholarships or dedicated courses for third-level students nationally, with existing support directed at second-level students or adults. Financial aid is limited to funding from individual institutions and those studying Irish, leaving many third-level students without accessible options. To ensure equal opportunity, third-level students should be able to take

part in Gaeltacht courses without financial constraints or without having to study Irish at third level.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to create courses for third-level students to study/spend time in the Gaeltacht and provide scholarships for them to attend such courses.**

Students from Irish-Medium Education

Students from Irish-medium backgrounds, whether from the Gaeltacht or from Irish-medium education at primary and/or secondary levels, often face significant difficulties when transitioning to English-language third-level education. The severe lack of third-level courses through Irish heightens these challenges, leaving many students struggling to adapt. It is crucial that targeted orientation programs through Irish are established and significantly increase the number of third-level courses offered in Irish.

- **USI/AMLÉ Urges the next government to implement orientation programs through Irish and expand the availability of third-level courses taught through Irish to ensure students from Irish-medium backgrounds can transition to third-level education.**

The Gaeltacht

Gaeltacht regions are vital for preserving Irish language and culture but face challenges such as emigration because of a lack of jobs, especially for people finishing college and wishing to move home to the Gaeltacht, housing such as no housing guidelines for planning permission in Gaeltacht regions, and lack of government investment. This trend threatens the future of these regions and the Irish language. Immediate government intervention is needed to create

employment opportunities, provide services, publication of the Treoiríní Pleanála Gaeltachta so that the youth can stay in the region.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to establish a dedicated fund and increase investment to sustain the Gaeltacht regions for future generations.**

TEG

TEG (Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge) exams are required for certain courses (such as teaching and Irish courses) and require fees that range from €80 to €250. Providing these exams at no cost would promote Irish language learning and make TEG accessible to all. TEG must also become much more widely implemented as a qualification to ensure that students doing degrees in the language or students entering

civil service-related courses are qualified in the language, especially considering the 20% target.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to make TEG exams free for courses in which it is a requirement and to be used in more courses, such as courses in Irish or those relating to the civil service.**

Hate Speech

Irish speakers face discrimination, ridicule, and derogatory remarks in public and online spaces, yet the Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 (Hate Speech Bill) lacks specific protections for Irish speakers. Current laws fail to address this form of hate speech effectively, undermining both Irish culture and identity and its speakers.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to amend hate speech laws to include language as a protected characteristic, along with guidelines for its implementation and a monitoring and reporting system.**

Promoting the use of Irish in the Dáil

Only 3-5% of debates and speeches in the Dáil and the Seanad are conducted in Irish. While Irish classes are available for elected officials who wish to improve their proficiency, the use of the language in parliamentary proceedings remains limited. Dáil Éireann provides live interpretation, which allows any elected TDs who does not understand Irish to hear questions and responses in English.

It is important for TDs to wear the headset provided during debates to understand and engage with the debate.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to commit to promoting the use of Irish in parliamentary sessions by mandating all elected TDs to use their Irish or to take part in Irish language classes offered in the Dáil.**

Free Irish Language Classes

In Wales, young people aged 18 to 25 have access to free Welsh language classes, a successful initiative that promotes the language and its heritage among the youth. A similar scheme should be introduced in Ireland, targeting third-level students and young people. It would ensure the preservation and growth of the Irish language among future generations

and get rid of the cost barrier which prohibits many people from engaging in learning the language.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to introduce free Irish classes scheme for young people and third-level students across the country.**

The North

Foras na Gaeilge is the cross-border body responsible for promoting the Irish language across the entire island of Ireland outside of the Gaeltacht. Established under the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Foras na Gaeilge plays a crucial role in fostering the use of the Irish language throughout Ireland. The Irish Government should work with the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure the continued support and funding of Foras na Gaeilge. The correct implementation of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 is crucial, including establishing an independent language

commissioner and ensuring bilingual signage in all public places. These steps are essential for the effective promotion and protection of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to strengthen Irish language promotion in Northern Ireland through working with the Northern Irish Executive and encourage establishing a language commissioner in the North, along with resuming Foras na Gaeilge funding from both governments.**

HEIs Irish Language Obligations

The Government must support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in fulfilling their obligations under the Official Languages Act 2021 (Amended), particularly those that are weaker in the Irish language. This support should include, but not be limited to, hiring Irish Language Officers and administrative staff, implementing new computer systems to

handle the Síneadh Fada, and ensuring bilingual signage and marketing.

- **USI/AMLÉ urges the next government to provide ring-fenced funding to aid HEIs in fulfilling their obligations under the Official Languages Act 2021 (amended).**

Coiste Gnó AMLÉ 2024-2025

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Rinneadh an aighneacht seo a chur in eagar ag Nathan Ó Murchú, Leas Uachtarán um Fheachtais AMLÉ.

Ba mhaith leis an Eagarthóir buíochas a ghabháil as rannpháirtíocht agus ról na mball de Chomhairle Náisiúnta, Foireann AMLÉ, agus eagraíochtaí comhpháirtíochta i bhforbairt an Fhorógra.

Dhein Seirbhísí Aistriúcháin DCU an forógra seo a aistriú.

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