

JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Proposed Amendment to the Student Support Act 2011

Speaking Points for Minister McHugh

Speaking Points - Introduction

- I would like to thank members of the Joint Committee for the early opportunity to brief you on the proposed amendment to the Student Support Act 2011. I am joined by my colleague Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O Connor, who will take you through the specifics of the proposed amendments.
- My Department prepared a statement, which was provided to the Committee, but I would like to add to that. As a Donegal person, I am very conscious of the impact of Brexit, not just in the daily lives of people living along the border, but of its potential impact on education.
- The most recent statistics (2015/ 2016) on cross border students flows indicate that there were 2,195 students from Ireland studying in NI HEIs, of whom 1,135 (*or 52% of the total*) were pursuing undergraduate programmes. Interestingly, the number of Irish students has declined by some 38% in the 5 years leading to 2015/ 2016.
- In contrast, the number of Northern Irish students studying in Irish HEIs has increased by 24% over the same time. Numerically, they stood at 1,200, with 980 pursuing (*or 82% of the total*) undergraduate programmes.

- But, this is only part of the picture - In 2017/ 2018, there were 10,070 Irish students in UK HEIs, with more than half were pursuing undergraduate programmes for the first time, while a further 44% were undertaking postgraduate studies.
- In the same year, there were 2,426 students from the UK in Irish HEIs, with 63% of these doing undergraduate studies.
- Clearly, not all of these students are eligible for SUSI supports. In 2017/ 2018, 1,475 (or 14%) of the Irish students attending UK HEIs were in receipt of the SUSI grant, which amounted to €5.2 million.
- In terms of the number of UK students in Irish HEIs, 205 (or 9%) were eligible for the SUSI grant. This amounted to €0.72 million.
- Since my appointment, my goal has been to protect the valuable and rich cooperation which takes place between education institutions on a North-South and an East-West basis. There are examples of this at all levels. I look at the North West Strategic Partnership where Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Donegal ETB work closely with the University of Ulster and North West Regional College from the North to ensure further and higher education provision are closely aligned with the skills and industrial needs for the region. In many senses, the border does not figure as these education institutions seek to develop a shared education and skills strategy.
- It is important to acknowledge the commitment of those educators at all levels who have built collaborations across the border – they deserve commendation and our appreciation. The foundations they have built must be protected, and strengthened.
- Indeed, there has been a shared education ecosystem between Ireland and the United Kingdom since the foundation of the State and even before that. It is hugely important that we protect and

preserve that collaboration into the future in the interests of our young people and in the interest of the quality of our education and training system.

- In this regard, we are working to maintain the Common Travel Area, which will protect much of the valuable and rich cooperation that takes place in education on a North-South and an East West basis.
- Both the Minister for Higher Education and myself view this amendment which is the focus of today's engagement as one of the key responses from my Department to the challenges of Brexit. It will facilitate the student mobility between Ireland, Northern Ireland and the wider UK, and enable me to meet education obligations under the Common Travel Area.
- I will now ask the Minister for Higher Education to take you through the proposed amendment

