



Irish Second-Level Students' Union Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education & Skills on the subject of the SUSI grant.

Ciara Fanning

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The Irish Second-Level Student's Union (ISSU) would like to thank the Chairperson and Committee Members for this opportunity to submit to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills regarding the SUSI grant. As the representative voice of second-level students we welcome the consultation of students on student issues.

One of the biggest barriers facing second-level students regarding the SUSI grant is the inability to be classed as a financially independent candidate if you are under 23 on the 1st of January preceding the start of your course. Many students are supporting themselves independently by working a part time job while in second-level education and throughout their third-level education, and are most in need of an "independent" status. Their parent's income, no matter the amount, has no influence on their own financial situation. The criteria for "estrangement" is very strict, with most students not meeting them but still facing the task of self-financing themselves if they wish to continue to third-level.

We recommend that the criteria for students under the age of 23 to be viable for classification as a financially independent candidate be made less severe, to allow for a more empathic and understanding system for students.

With the rising cost of living and education, many second-level students work part-time jobs throughout their education and summer holidays. The numbers of 16 and 17 year olds becoming employed has increased more than 20% in a period of three years, from 25,000 in 2015 to 30,650 in 2017. ISSU members have reported having to leave their part time employment in order to be eligible for the SUSI grant, as their own income would put them just over the edge of the eligibility criteria, meaning there is more to lose than gain by working part time. In an economy where it is necessary for a lot of young people to find part-time work, and where many sectors rely on these workers, the system should not be punishing them for doing so.

We recommend that the allowance for earnings of students with summer employment be extended to include weekend and part time work throughout the academic year.

While the SUSI grant in its current form still serves its purpose as an accessibility tool to allow students to progress to third level, the amount payable to recipients has remained the same since its introduction in 2012. This is not reflective of the cost of living now faced by students, particularly for housing in larger cities. Where once a maintenance grant of €3000



may have covered the full cost of accommodation for the academic term, now it does not even cover half in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

For the SUSI grant to fulfil its intended purpose it is integral that it be increased to reflect the increased cost of living for students to make third level education as accessible as possible, or allowances made for students attending institutions in the larger towns and cities. Alternatively, the purpose-built student accommodation on campuses and by private providers should be capped.

Third level education must be accessible to all students, regardless of income and financial background, and the SUSI system must be as efficient as possible to allow students to progress with the development of their education. The reality of the cost-of-living and eligibility criteria is much different today than 2012, and we ask that Committee members take this into account and take on board our recommendations to ensure that SUSI, as intended, does not leave any student behind.