



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

Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

Submission to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,  
Innovation and Science

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Cathaoirleach, USI welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Sub-Committee on North/South Student Mobility and thanks you and the members for this opportunity.

USI (Union of Students of Ireland) is the national representative body for the 374,000 third level students on the Island of Ireland. USI liaises with our member organisations on campuses and has 30 member organisations spread across the Island of Ireland, North and South.

The mobility of students between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is a significant aspect of educational and cultural exchange within the Island. Education mobility between NI and ROI is facilitated by various agreements and frameworks, including the Common Travel Area (CTA) and the Good Friday Agreement. These agreements provide a foundation for cooperation in education, allowing students to move freely across the border to pursue their studies. It can definitely be appreciated the 40 million that was invested in Ulster University in the Magee campus in Derry, which underlying was to actively engage in collaborative efforts of teaching and research between Ulster University and the Atlantic Technological University Donegal, such collaborations enhance the quality of education and promotes cultural exchange among students.

When we look at the issues of students studying in the North, we must firstly look at the issue of clarity and limited awareness of available opportunities among students. If students look at the cost of studying in the North, there is a misconception that SUSI can cover tuition and maintenance, as if you were to go to any other college in the ROI. While the clarity of this can be found, unless you know to look for it, you won't find it. This leads on to the consistency of options of studying in the North provided by Career Guidance Counsellors in Secondary Education and assistance on applying. The teaching of writing a personal statement for the UCAS could be an invaluable help to students, that otherwise may be a barrier to it due to uncertainty. An awareness campaign to inform students, parents, and educators about available opportunities for cross-border education and the support services available can help increase participation rates. This could be done with packs being sent to schools or a website being developed for things to be laid out clearer, with a drop down of each college on the island of Ireland with tips of how to apply to allow better North/South, South/North mobility. Such information that could be mentioned on such a website could be Y-Link/Leap cards for public transport, student accommodation available near the colleges. How to set up a bank account or how to use the phone services

**Diagnosable Learning Difficulties:** We believe in a corridor of information between NHS/HSE for people that have been assessed with learning difficulties to take away from the financial barrier of paying twice for the same assessment. Also, to help with complications that may arise with repeat prescriptions.

**CAO Offer Release Dates:** Earlier release dates of CAO offers has always been cited as a barrier for mobility for the North coming here as well, as well as causing difficulties for students within this region already. This falls to the moving of the later Leaving Cert Results release date and is not the fault of the CAO itself. A conditional offer system that UCAS provides could be a beneficial addition to the CAO, as this could help with earlier planning around booking accommodation for students and take away from students making multiple bookings.

**Universities Ireland Report:** With the announcement of Universities Ireland report

recommending changes for students from Northern Ireland to access education, we welcome this easement. The four A-levels was consistently flagged with us as an issue to come south to study, although we would await the implementation of this for the 2024/2025 academic year to see if this will boost student mobility.

**Closer Collaboration:** Encouraging closer collaboration between educational institutions through joint initiatives, such as shared academic programs and research partnerships, can enrich the educational experience and promote cross-cultural understanding among students.

**Expanding Funding Opportunities:** Increasing funding for education mobility programs, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, can help make cross-border education more accessible and inclusive.

**Policy Alignment:** Ensuring alignment between education policies and practices in NI and ROI to facilitate smoother transitions for students and remove unnecessary barriers to education mobility.

**Conclusion:** Education mobility between NI and ROI plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation, enriching the educational experience, and promoting cultural exchange on the island. By addressing existing challenges and leveraging opportunities for enhancement, stakeholders can work towards promoting greater education mobility, ensuring that all students have access to the benefits of cross-border education in Ireland. Continued collaboration and commitment from policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders are essential to realising the full potential of education mobility between the North and South.