



Tithe an Oireachtais

An Comhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna

**Tuarascáil maidir le hincháilitheacht deontais
chothabhála do mhic léinn**

(Tacaíocht Uilíoch Mac Léinn Éireann a mhúscailt)

Mean Fómhair 2017

Houses of the Oireachtas

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

**Report on the eligibility of maintenance grants to students
(Wake-up SUSI)**

September 2017



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Chairman's Foreword

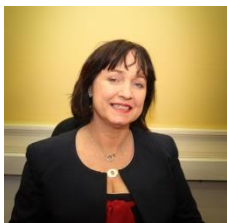
One of the topics the Joint Committee wished to consider was the concerns surrounding eligibility to maintenance grants (SUSI grants) to students attending certain private higher education colleges.

The Committee decided to hold a public meeting to hear the views of those affected and invited the Chairman and members of the Wake Up SUSI committee (which represents several student unions across the Country) to a public meeting on the 13th October 2016.

From the evidence provided to the Committee it appeared that there was a distinct lack of clarity in relation to which colleges qualified for the payment of SUSI grants. Also there seemed to be a huge frustration for students in regards to the perceived inequality of the SUSI grant scheme.

I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the Committee to air their views on this matter.

Fiona O'Loughlin T.D.
Chairman
September 2017



Introduction

SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) is Ireland's single national awarding authority for all higher and further education grants. SUSI offers funding to eligible students in approved full-time, third-level education in Ireland and, in some cases, funding for students studying outside the State. However, some do not feel that the eligibility criterion is equitable and the Wake Up SUSI campaign was formed.

The Wake Up SUSI campaign represent 200 students who are eligible for SUSI grants based on income who have applied on the State approved CAO, for a State approved full-time QQI validated degree, at State recognised institutions who award up to Master's Level 9 on the National Qualifications Framework.

The Wake Up SUSI committee is seeking to have the same state funding made available to those other third-level students who are attending similar State approved institutions. They state that there should be equality for all Irish students regardless of the institution they attend.

Key Issues raised in presentation

One of the main issues that the Committee heard was in relation to the CAO application process. It was stated that students who are eligible for the SUSI maintenance grant apply to certain CAO approved colleges and it is not until they have been accepted by their college of choice do they realise that the grant isn't available to them.

The Committee was told of the case were a student, who was eligible for a maintenance grant, applied to study a course in Dublin Business School (DBS). It was not until they were offered their college place did they realise that they would not be awarded a SUSI grant for the course. However, if the student had registered for the same course at the Dublin Institute of Technology, located only a few minutes up the road, the full SUSI grant of €2,800 and registration grant of €3,000 would have been paid. The student in question wished to complete a course in psychology and with very few colleges offering such courses they felt discriminated due to this restriction.

Effect of current system

While dropout rates can be high in the first year of college due to a personal decision by the student not to continue, it was put to the Committee that there has been a high rate of college dropouts due to the lack of SUSI grants awarded to students in private colleges under the current system. Students who apply for courses, not aware that no grant will be made available, realise very soon that attending their preferred course is unsustainable and therefore dropout.

Key points raised by Wake Up SUSI

The Wake Up SUSI committee have a number of questions that they feel need to be addressed. These are:

- “How can SUSI refuse grants to disadvantaged students? How can the State on the one hand fund private secondary schools to over €80 million a year, support private health care, private transport, and private media while discriminating against us merely because we attend private institutions?”
- Why are students being discriminated against because the QQI full-time degrees we chose happens to be at private colleges?
- Why is it that students attending non-state owned institutions like the Royal College of Surgeons, National College of Ireland among many others get their student grants and we are refused?”

Conclusions

Attendance at a college, which doesn't attract a SUSI grant, may be necessary due to limited number of colleges offering a particular course. This can limit the choices open to those who rely on grants.

The CAO application process appears to be in need of review to ensure that all relevant information is easily accessible and clear.

The SUSI website may also need to be reviewed. Currently the website contains an "Eligibility Reckoner" which, upon entering particular details, suggests that an applicant may qualify for a SUSI grant. While the website does contain a list of colleges eligible for payment of a SUSI grant, the prominence of this information may need to be reviewed to assist students in making a fully informed decision regarding choice of college.

It was noted by the Committee that eligible students who attend private colleges do not wish to receive a higher grant; they just wish to receive the same level of grant to those who attend public institutions.

The Committee notes that, if a student attends Griffith College, which is a private college, and one attends the Dublin Institute of Technology both will receive the same Quality and Qualifications Ireland-approved degree. However, while one student may qualify for a SUSI grant, the other will not simply because of their choice of college.

The Committee also notes that it is recommended in the Cassells Report, Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, that low-income families whose children choose to attend private colleges should receive SUSI funding.

Recommendations

The Committee recommends a review of the SUSI website and in particular the “Eligibility Reckoner” is undertaken to ensure that a student is clear on the SUSI eligibility regarding their choice of college. The Eligibility Reckoner should require the applicant to select their preferred college at the beginning of the process and, at that point, clearly indicate if a grant is payable in respect of their attendance at that college.

The Committee also recommend that the Department undertake a review of the CAO application process to clearly identify the college courses and colleges that qualify for a SUSI grant.

The Committee further recommends that, subject to the course and college being QQI approved, eligibility for a maintenance grant should be based on the means of the student rather than on the choice of college. This approach could result in an increase in competition among colleges and may reduce costs.

The Committee further recommends that students enrolled at private colleges should, if eligible under the relevant SUSI criteria, be entitled to the same value of SUSI funding for payment of annual degree course fees that they would receive at an equivalent course in a state funded higher education institution.

The Committee further recommends that students enrolled in private colleges should be entitled to access the Student Assistance Fund.

Appendix 1

Committee Membership

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Deputies: Joan Burton (LAB)
Thomas Byrne (FF)
Ciaran Cannon (FG)
Jim Daly (FG)
Catherine Martin (GP)
Carol Nolan (SF)
Fiona O'Loughlin (FF) (Chair)

Senators: Maria Byrne (FG)
Robbie Gallagher (FF)
Trevor Ó'Clochartaigh (SF)
Lynn Ruane (IND)

Notes:

1. Deputies nominated by the Dáil Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Dáil on 16 June 2016.
2. Senators nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 22 July 2016.

Appendix 2

Terms of Reference

- (1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—
 - (a) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and
 - (b) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.
- (2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.
- (3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—
 - (a) Bills,
 - (b) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,
 - (c) Estimates for Public Services, and
 - (d) other matters as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and
 - (e) Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and
 - (f) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.
- (4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies:
 - (a) matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,
 - (b) public affairs administered by the Department,
 - (c) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,

- (d) Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,
 - (e) policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,
 - (f) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,
 - (g) any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,
 - (h) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,
 - (i) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,
 - (j) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and
 - (k) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.
- (5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—
- (a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,
 - (b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,
 - (c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and

- (d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.
- (6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee.
- (7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:
 - (a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,
 - (b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and
 - (c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.

b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]

- (1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders.
- (2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.
- (3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—
 - a) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or

- b) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.

- (5) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.