



INDEPENDENT LIVING
MOVEMENT IRELAND

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ILMI Submission to the Student Grant Scheme Review

April 16th 2020

[Independent Living Movement Ireland \(ILMI\)](http://www.ilmi.ie) is a campaigning, national Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO) that promotes the philosophy of independent living and seeks to build an inclusive society. Central to the way we work is to ensure that policy decisions that impact on the lives of disabled people must be directly influenced by those whose lives are directly affected. Our philosophy can be summed up as: 'Nothing about us without us!' and 'Rights Not Charity'. Our vision is an Ireland where disabled persons have freedom, choice and control over all aspects of their lives and can fully participate in an inclusive society as equals.

ILMI welcomed Minister Harris announcement on the review of the student grant scheme. We as a national disabled person's organisation (DPO) are extremely well placed to make an authentic written submission to the state report.

Social model of disability

The UNCRPD at its core is framed through an understanding of disability known as the social model of disability. From ILMI's perspective, it is vital that there is a clear and full understanding of what the social model of disability is and how it should inform future discussions on policy development and improvement and policy implementation.

The social model looks at how society is structured and how it disables people. It is not based on a person's impairment, it is focussed on the barriers that exist in terms of attitudes, policy development, access or lack of supports that prevent people from participating in society as equals, with choice and control over their own lives. In this model it is society that disables people from achieving their hopes and dreams, not a person's impairment. The social model informs all aspects of the work of Independent Living Movement Ireland.

Language and representation of disabled people

Independent Living Movement Ireland recognises that language is a very powerful and evocative tool. Therefore, the language and terminology used in this submission has been carefully chosen to reflect the values of equality and empowerment which is at the core of this organisation. The term 'disabled people' has been used throughout the submission in accordance with the UPIAS classification of disability and impairment which has been developed by disabled people themselves (UPIAS 1976). Where disabled people are referred to in the submission this should be understood to include all disabled people, including those with learning difficulties, people experiencing emotional distress and physical and sensory impairments.

Article 4.3 and 29 B

The UNCRPD makes specific references to state party commitments to ensure disabled people are effectively involved in all policy forums which article 4.3 and 29. B of the convention state. Article 4 - General obligations 3 outlines that state parties shall closely consult with and actively involve disabled people, including disabled children.

Article 29. B outlines actively promoting an environment in which disabled people can "effectively and fully participate" in public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Article 29 B also states participation of disabled people in non-governmental organisations and associations concerned with public and political life. Most importantly article 29 B states disabled people should be involved in "forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels". For far too long disabled people have been excluded from participation in decision making structures at all levels. Disabled people want to have their views heard and valued to advance equality, social justice and sustainability through active engagement in decision-making, rebalancing of power in this process, and investing resources to support this engagement.

“Nothing about us without us”: the role of Disabled Persons’ Organisations (DPOs)

DPOs, unlike disability services providers, are led by and for disabled people. It is vitally important that this is understood and we need to ensure that we have our contributions heard, represented and recognised in policy development.

Under the UNCRPD article 24 recognises that disabled people have the same rights as others to education. Ireland published its draft state report in December 2020. The State made forty one observations under article 24 relating to education. However, the following information was gathered in consultation with our members relating to the review of the student grant scheme.

- There is a lack of supports / grants for part-time disabled students. This disproportionality affects disabled people. For some disabled people, accessing third level education on a part time basis would be preferable but this is not possible due to the lack of access to grants.
- “Catherine’s law” has been a fantastic and welcomed development however, it does not apply to all postgraduate courses. We need to ensure that disabled students who progress in any element of education are not penalised or that it does not affect the disabled persons supports (disability allowance) or secondary benefits (travel pass or medical card). This law does not include part time PhD’s for disabled people and often part time studies works well for disabled students.
- There is a need for a blended approach to learning however disabled people should have choice and not be “pigeon holed” to learn from home as the only option.
- The SUSI application process needs to be fully accessible. Application forms need to be available in easy to read and plain English. People with Intellectual Disability can be excluded from applying for student grant schemes. Often the language is quite complex. The website needs to be fully accessible. Submitting via hard-copy should still be an option and copies in braille need to be available.
- ISL needs to be provided when communicating information about SUSI grant schemes.

- It would be very important to ensure career guidance counsellors are fully aware of SUSI, especially if any adjustments are made following the review. These people are often the first point of contact for students regarding SUSI. It would be important to ensure that guidance counsellors meet with students one-on-one (where possible) and accommodate their needs communication and/or otherwise.
- Disabled students who have had part-time or summer jobs during their time in secondary school may be penalised when they are applying for SUSI. This disproportionately affects students from one-parent families, low-income backgrounds. Disabled students face additional financial barriers as there is a “cost to disability”. Examples include increased use of heating in the home, adaptive furniture, adaptive footwear, wheelchairs and maintenance, travel expenses for hospital trip and overnight stays, adaptations in the home or car
- While not a specific issue for only disabled students, it is often the case that students are not entitled to SUSI as one income or a combined income of two parents/guardians may be slightly over the threshold. However, in cases where disability or illness is in a household a family will incur significant expenses that are not considered in the SUSI application.
- For accessibility purposes there should be one-on-one consultations whereby students could be guided through the process. This could be helpful for students who have follow-up questions that may be more technical in nature following discussion with their guidance counsellor. This would be particularly helpful to people who need tailored methods of communication (visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, people who have difficulty with literacy / numeracy and individuals from marginalised backgrounds, where English is not the first language in the family home).
- Often students lose their payment as they have to repeat a college year. Of course there are an array of reasons why students' grades might be affected: illness (either themselves or a family member), grief, difficulties brought on by Covid-19 and remote learning and SUSI justifies this by saying a student is "not progressing in their education". The SUSI review needs to accommodate genuine external factors outside of academic performance which may necessitate a student to repeat a year and still access their grant.

- There is a serious lack of supports for disabled people with regards to their non-academic experience of third level. This also forms a significant part of student life and disabled people are often excluded from this.
- Personal Assistance is only provided to disabled students for academic hours through HEA funding. Non-academic personal assistance is not guaranteed and is subject to provision from HSE. If not granted, students may not be able to attend the college or course they want, even though they have met all necessary requirements to do so. Non-academic personal assistance should be provided through a specific third level scheme. In instances where overnight PA support is needed, accommodation costs are doubled in order to provide the PA with a room. Also the supports (PA's) that are assigned to you in 3rd level are hired before you even start the course taking away control from the disabled person.
- If someone has a degree or post graduate qualification and acquire a disability (impairment) and they may need to "re train" They are automatically disqualified as the system currently registers the student as someone who "already has a degree" .This needs to change.
- There was a suggestion to have a consultation around HEAR and DARE schemes.
- A review of SUSI necessitates a broader Departmental review of how disabled people can access these schemes across all QQI course levels.