

Standing up for
young people



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SINN FÉIN IS ON YOUR SIDE

Young people have always been an easy target for Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Young people were the very first cohort of people to be hit with cuts when the economic crash hit. Just like those who were hardest hit at the time, young people had no act or part in the economic downfall. Yet, they paid the greatest price. Of course, these cuts were nicely camouflaged; these cuts were supposedly for the “good” of young people, an incentive from Government to get up and find work or return to education and avoid welfare. In truth, cuts to young people served one purpose and the message was clear; leave your families and communities and emigrate.

For those young people who remain here or those who may wish to return home, they will ask themselves questions. Can I afford to rent here? Can I afford to run a car? Can I find full time and meaningful employment? Can I afford to raise a family? Under the present Government, many simply can't.

Sinn Féin believes that young people deserve the same rights and equality as everyone else. A young Jobseeker deserves a fair payment that they can live on while searching for work. A young student deserves the right to go

on to Third Level Education and achieve their desired qualifications. A young teacher deserves the same pay as his/her co-workers for the same work.

A young person deserves access to adequate mental health services if and when they need them. Young people deserve equal opportunities, equality and fairness. Sinn Féin is choosing to take the side of young people.

Sinn Féin's alternative Budget 2018 proposals will:

1. Increase weekly jobseeker payments for the under 26s by €30
2. Invest in Third Level Education
3. Ensure Equal Pay for Equal Work over 3 Budgets beginning in 2018
4. Invest properly in mental health services for our young people
5. Develop a National Youth Arts Strategy

1. RESTORE JOBSEEKERS PAYMENTS FOR THE UNDER 26S

Thanks to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, inequality is entrenched in our Social Protection system. Fine Gael has sustained a situation created by Fianna Fáil where the amount you receive depends on your age. Currently, those aged 18-24 receive a weekly payment of €102.70, with those aged 25 receiving €147.80. In comparison, the full rate for those aged over 26 is €193. This is completely unfair and without any justification. Neither Fine Gael nor Fianna Fáil carried out any research as to the potential impact of these cuts; they just introduced them and continued them. They have ignored calls from numerous organisations, such as the National Youth Council of Ireland, to restore the payment.

Sinn Féin remain committed to restoring Jobseekers payments for the under 26s to the full rate. We want to close the gap that has been created and we want to put an end to age discrimination.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- €30 increase for Jobseekers aged 18-25 as a first step to its full restoration Cost €38m

2. INVEST IN THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION

The fees, added charges, and strict criteria around student grants make access to Third Level Education difficult for young people. These costs deter young people from being able to attend Third Level Education. This is detrimental to their personal development.

The Cassells Report outlined the extent to which Higher Education has been severely underfunded in Ireland. Sinn Féin recognises the value of education and the positive impact this in turn, has on our economic development.

Among Sinn Féin's Education proposals are the following measures to make Third Level Education more accessible for young people:

- Reduce the Student Contribution charge by €500 Cost €7.07m for 2018 (full year cost €37m)
- Abolish PLC course fee Cost €3 million
- Increase Core Funding to Higher Education Institutions Cost €9.6m
- Reduce the Student-to-Staff Ratio in Institutes of Technology by 1 point Cost €8.51 million for 2018 (full year cost €25.62 million)
- Increase Funding for the Student Assistance Fund and the Scheme for Students with Disabilities by 20% Cost €3.74 million
- 500 places on the Momentum Scheme for people with disabilities Cost €1.6 million

3. ENSURE EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

Cuts to public sector pay have predominantly impacted on young professionals such as teachers and nurses. Having spent years studying and working hard to gain qualifications, young people entered employment receiving far less income than their co-workers – doing the exact same job. This is a prime example of the discrimination and inequality that has been forced upon our young people.

Public sector workers have suffered on average a 15% cut in pay. On top of this, new entrants from 1 January 2011 start on a pay scale that is on average 10% lower than the rest of the workforce.

Again, this is another way that young people have been punished by this Government and successive Governments. Sinn Féin believes in Equal pay for Equal work. We utterly oppose a two tier payment structure within our public service.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- Return to a single-tier pay structure within the public service
- Pay increases for post-2011 workers over 3 years to bring them up to the same levels as their co-workers Cost €69.67m in 2018

4. INVEST PROPERLY IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Mental health has never been adequately funded or resourced. In last year's Budget Fine Gael allocated 6.4% of the total health budget to mental health – no-where near what is required. Mental health services for our young people are particularly absent. In cases of distress or a risk of suicide, all too often there is no place to turn. Sinn Féin wants to see significant increases in the mental health Budget. It can no longer be an add-on at the end of the Health spend. It must be a priority.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- Speed up roll-out of 24/7 Crisis Intervention Services Cost: €20m
- 30 Additional Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Nurse positions Cost: €1.49m (full year cost €1.98 million)
- Triple budget for counselling in primary care Cost: €7.5m
- Fund counselling and other mental health services for people currently in Direct Provision Cost: €1m
- 5 Additional Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurses Cost: €0.33m
- Increased investment in response to addiction and dual-diagnosis Cost: €12m

5. DEVELOP A NATIONAL YOUTH ARTS STRATEGY

Sinn Féin recognises the importance of providing a space for young people to express themselves in artistic and creative ways. Without doubt, this talent should be harnessed and encouraged.

Sinn Féin proposes to deliver a National Youth Arts Strategy promoting participation, progression and provision over a term in Government.

The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, working alongside both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills should carry out research, planning and consultation on a National Youth Arts Strategy over a period of 24 months, at no additional cost to the exchequer.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- A three year implementation programme to follow the initial two year research, planning and consultation phase Cost: €5m



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