

Susi Press Release

Heartbreaking emails paint bleak picture of system not fit for purpose" - Cllr Emer Tóibín, Aontú

78 pages of email correspondence sent by students to the Minister for Further and Higher Education - Simon Harris - have been released to the political party Aontú under the Freedom of Information Act. It comes as figures released to party leader Peadar Tóibín TD show that during this academic year 2,050 students had their SUSI grant withdrawn from them mid-term.

Commenting on the documents released to her party, Meath-based Aontú Councillor, Emer Tóibín, said:

"The documents released to us paint a very, very bleak picture of a student grant system which is cold, conservative, unfit for purpose and in urgent need of reform. Every year Aontú's elected representatives around the country help countless students who are experiencing difficulties with their SUSI grant applications. This year it is becoming more evident to me that SUSI seem to have behaved in a fashion much stricter than previous years. This is unfair, especially during a global pandemic. I am a former lecturer myself, and I am aware that most students around the country are still paying extremely hefty sums in fees to their respective colleges or universities. This is especially unfair given that for the past year, the education that these students have received consisted of occasional online zoom calls and multiple assignments. Yet they are still being charged enormous fees".

Cllr Tóibín continued: "I raised the issue at this week's meeting of the County Council, and I will do so again at the next meeting. The emails which Aontú have secured under Freedom of Information are upsetting - I've read them and I can see many tales of woe - students whose parents have died, students who are homeless, unemployed, single parents to young children, all emailing the Minister perplexed at how they were refused assistance from SUSI while some of their peers in more financially stable situations were offered support. I am aware of instances where a number of siblings from the same family all apply for the grant - the variables are all the same - they live the same distance from the college, they share the same parents, same household income, etc and then one sibling qualifies for the grant while another doesn't get a penny. There seems to be no consistency with the system at all. Particularly harrowing are the accounts from students who are estranged from their parents - the lengths these students are forced to go to in order to prove estrangement are, quite frankly, inhumane - the process, I'm told, involves Gardaí and solicitor letters"

"At a time of global pandemic, recession and mass unemployment, we, as a nation, should be working to try to keep young people in education, and I am very afraid that if we do not see the SUSI reform which has been much spoken about as a matter of urgency, we will inevitably see a repeat of the scenes we witnessed during the last recession - scenes of young people queuing in droves at our airports to travel abroad in search of work. Minister Harris must provide an immediate update on what is actually happening in terms of SUSI reform", concluded Tóibín