Ministers Harris and Collins launch €50 million once-off COVID-19 payment scheme

From Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

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Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris TD and Minister of State for Skills and Further Education Niall Collins TD have today (Thursday) announced a €50 million once-off COVID-19 payment scheme for third level students.

The funding, which was provided in Budget 2021, aims to offer assistance to all EU full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students in recognition of the significant upheaval they have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scheme will ensure students who avail of the SUSI grant will receive €250 top-up in their grant before Christmas, while students who do not avail of the grant can reduce by €250 any outstanding contribution fee payments or receive a €250 credit note for their institution. In a small number of cases, alternative arrangements will be made for the payment of the monies to students.

Minister Harris said:

"The government is acutely conscious of the year this has been for third-level students. In March, colleges closed their doors and moved everything online.

"The new academic year has also meant little or no on-campus time. Today’s scheme is a recognition of the financial challenges this has brought for many people and we hope it can go some way to compensating students for any equipment a student may have had to pay for – such as a desk, chair, or new laptop.

"COVID-19 has disrupted all our lives but for young people, it has resulted in many missed moments and many key life experiences. Today is a chance to recognise that.

"I also want to take the chance to thank the HEA, IUA, THEA, TU Dublin and SUSI for all their assistance in bringing this much-needed support to students. SUSI and institutions will be communicating directly with students over the coming weeks on this matter."

Minister Collins added:
"Minister Harris and I were eager to ensure Budget 2021 recognised the huge challenges students have faced this year. They have missed out on significant milestones in their lives.

"This support package goes some way to helping them round off a difficult year. It is in addition to the €15 million Minister Harris and I secured for IT supports, the €10 million for access supports and €3 million in support for wellbeing and mental health."

Minister Harris also confirmed he and Minister Collins will today meet with the presidents of all third level institutions to discuss college life in 2021.

The Minister also encouraged students who may be experiencing challenges or difficulties to text 50808 – a 24/7 helpline to help students with any issues they may have.