

# ANNUAL REPORT

TUARASCÁIL BLIANTÚIL



**Union of Students in Ireland**  
*Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn*

**2013/2014**

**TOGETHER WE'RE STRONGER**

**NÍ NEART GO CUR LE CHÉILE**

# MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF USI



Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology  
**STUDENTS' UNION**





Institute of Technology Carlow  
**Students' Union**



**NUI Galway  
Students' Union**  
Comhaltas na Mac Léinn  
OÉ Gaillimh



Queen's  
Students'  
Union



St. Mary's  
University College  
Belfast  
A College of Queen's University



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# PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

A chairde,

It is my great pleasure to bring you the USI Annual Report 2013/14.



Last year this Officer Board team was elected at USI Annual Congress on a clear platform of fighting to protect student supports and equity of access to education, strengthening our organisation and delivering and advancing equality for our members. Our very successful Annual Congress in Athlone clearly affirmed that the student movement has turned a corner and is on the right track.

We have restored credibility to the student movement's ability to deliver on our policy goals, even in the most challenging times, through a successful Pre-Budget campaign. We have clear and well-researched policy on third-level funding to support our clear ideological belief in Higher Education as a public good. We have a more united student movement than ever before, with every Institute of Technology in the country, and the return of CIT and DCU Students' Unions to USI after more than a decade apart.

We have a strategic financial plan and an income diversification strategy which provides for the financial stability of the organisation as well as improved service provision for our members. One of the most enjoyable aspects of this role has been the varied and wide range of issues we have had the opportunity to work on, with the common goal of improving student life for our members.

This Annual Report outlines how USI, through the support of our member Students' Unions and the commitment of our dedicated student activists right across the country, delivered on our objectives on many of these issues. This provides an opportune time for us to not only reflect on our achievements, but to recognise the enormous challenges that still exist, and the great many barriers facing our membership. Enormous challenges still exist, and there is no room for complacency. It is our collective responsibility to continue to apply ourselves fully to address these issues in the best interests of the students of Ireland.

For now, let's take a look back at 2013/14.

Beir bua,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Joe O'Connor'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joe O'Connor,  
USI President 2013/14

# USI OFFICER BOARD 2013-2014



President  
Deputy President/VP for Welfare  
VP Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance  
VP Equality and Citizenship  
VP Campaigns  
VP Irish Language  
VP for Border, Midlands and Western Region  
VP Southern Region  
NUS-USI President

Joe O'Connor  
Denise McCarthy  
Cat O'Driscoll  
Laura Harmon  
Paddy Guiney  
Feidhlim Seoighe  
Kevin Donoghue  
Ciara Guinan  
Rebecca Hall

(From Top Left-Right: Cat O'Driscoll, Kevin Donoghue, Paddy Guiney, Feidhlim Seoighe, Front Left to Right: Ciara Guinan, Denise McCarthy, Laura Harmon, Rebecca Hall and Joe O'Connor.)

## USI STAFF

Ben Archibald (General Manager)  
Denise Glover (Business Administrator)  
Gráinne O Reilly (Communications and Research Executive)



# JULY



## Students' Union Training

The annual Students' Union Training (SUT) event was held in Waterford IT in July. Students' Union Officers of USI member organisations from across the country travelled to Waterford IT for USI SUT 2013. Officers took part in over 50 training modules throughout the week with high calibre facilitators. Former Mountjoy Governor, John Lonergan and Adventurer & Entrepreneur Pat Falvey delivered key note addresses at SUT 2013.

## Launch of GAA Emigration Campaign

To highlight the number of Irish GAA players being lost to overseas teams due to forced emigration, USI held a media campaign at SUT in Waterford. It followed the weekend that saw London play in a historic Connacht final. USI highlighted the unprecedented numbers of qualified graduates being forced to leave Ireland. More than 120,000 young people between the ages of 15-24 emigrated in the last four years. And, of those who have stayed behind, one in two graduates had no work at all in 2012. Behind the achievements of the London GAA team is the tragic fact that many young people in Ireland have had no choice but to leave Ireland to find work.





## Pro Choice Rally

USI has been very active on this campaign in line with our pro-choice mandates. On the 9th of July the USI Equality and Citizenship Officer attended the pro-choice sleep-out outside the Dáil with pro-choice campaigners and the Education Officer in IADT Students' Union. On the 10th of July, USI drafted a press release on USI's response to the 'Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill 2013.' USI attended the pro-choice rally outside the Dáil on the same day from 6pm until after midnight. There were lots of students there from Trinity College Dublin and IADT Students' Union amongst others.

## Migrant Fee

The Union of Students in Ireland welcomed the announcement from the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn TD, regarding changes in the fees arrangements for migrant students living in Ireland on July 25th. In future, non-EEA nationals who acquire EEA citizenship during their college course will no longer be required to pay full tuition fees. The change means migrant students who become Irish citizens during third level will no longer be forced to continue paying the high fees applied to those without Irish citizenship. The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland estimates that around 700 students could benefit from the move.

## Volunteering and Citizen Task Force

The Task Force on Volunteering and Citizenship was established in July. It met several times throughout the year and created policy which was passed by National Council and Congress around voter registration and marriage equality campaigning strategies and political reform. The Task Force also took the lead on USI's campaign to retain Seanad Éireann.



# AUGUST

## Hard Knock life for students

A photo stunt took place in Knock Airport in early August last year. The idea, and much of the planning was executed by NUIGSU, who chose to extend an invitation to USI and other colleges in the BMW Region. The stunt highlighted the numbers of educated and skilled individuals leaving the country in search of work.



## Community Engagement

Community Engagement events were held in a variety of locations across the country. Each regional officer organised a number of community engagement events throughout the year. The purpose of these events was to reach out and engage with the local community in a positive manner. In addition to these regional engagements we held Christmas Community events with a Children's Christmas Party theme in 3 regions: Athlone, Tralee and Trinity College Dublin. USI was a partner in the 2FM/St Vincent de Paul Toy Appeal campaign, supported by Students' Unions across the country.



## Crossover Tour

A Campus Crossover Tour was organised during the summer and visited IADT, LIT, IT Sligo, ST Angelas, NUI Maynooth and CIT.

## USI – NUS USI Network

In August USI Officer Board, NUS-USI President and officers, and officers in the North took part in a networking event in NUS USI offices.

## Top Up Training

Top Up Training was hosted by Trinity College Students' Union alongside the August National Council. Training included modules on media engagement, public speaking and student finance. There was also full day sessions run in parallel; Health Promotion for Welfare Officers and Policy Development for Education Officers.

## SUSI Deadline

After the first SUSI roll out it, encountered many problems. For it's second year there were many changes to be made. These included moving the application closing date to a month earlier, reducing the amounts of documentation by linking into the Revenue and Social Welfare databases and creating a new communications strategy with USI. A separate helpdesk was arranged for the use of USI member sabbatical officers to assist them with casework and this was very useful.



### March for Marriage

On the 20th of August, the USI had a large delegation and voter registration stand at the LGBT Noise March for Marriage. We congregated in Trinity College Dublin and joined the march at City Hall. Back in June, USI had a visible presence at Dublin Pride 2013. USI LGBT Ally bands were handed out to the crowd and highlighted the need for Transgender Rights and Marriage Equality.



### Letter to Russian Embassy

On the 7th of August, USI, BeLong To Youth Services, The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and the International LGBTQ Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO) joined together to express our concern at the rise in public violence towards LGBT young people in Russia following the passing of homophobic legislation in the Russian parliament. Jointly we delivered a co-signed letter to the Russian Ambassador in

### USI National Charity

The annual USI National Charity was chosen at the August National Council in Trinity College Dublin. TCD Students' Union proposed 'Headstrong' which was voted as USI's national charity for 2013/2014. Headstrong works to change how Ireland thinks about young people's mental health through the Jig-saw Programme of service development, through Research and Advocacy.

### Guide to Student Life

USI, with the support of PRTB launched the Guide to Student Life in DIT, NUIG & IT Carlow. This comprehensive guide is a useful resource for students and gives great tips and advice on student life. The guide covers accommodation advice, money management, personal safety and settling into college. Easy-to-use budget sheets and rent book logs are included, enabling students to keep weekly or monthly budgets that will help monitor their income and expenditure and keep a record of rent paid.



# SEPTEMBER

## Fresher Packs

In September for the first time in recent years over 30,000 Fresher Packs were delivered to USI member Students' Union. The packs contained a USI Wall Planner and Guide, a pocket book sized USI Guide to Student Life and great promotional materials and products from a number of supporting organisations.

## Freshers Week Competition with Think Contraception

USI and Think Contraception teamed up to coordinate a competition for member Students' Unions. Students' Unions were encouraged to run a sexual health event on campus during their Freshers Week. The best 5 events won 4,000 condoms each to use for their next sexual health event/activity/campaign on campus.

## Seachtain na bhFreisir

USI received over 100,000 promotional materials from Foras na Gaeilge, the public body responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the island of Ireland. These materials got distributed amongst the MO's and Cumann Gaelacha, at the beginning of the year. These materials were used by students involved in the Cumann Gaelacha to increase membership and increase student engagement with Irish Language events on Campus. This was a great opportunity for USI to engage with students on the ground.

## SERD Voter Registration Drives

A key aspect of the Pre-Budget campaign was the first-ever national student voter registration database, SERD (Student Elector Registration Database). This set out to dispel the notion that students do not vote, and to provide a sophisticated communications tool capable of mobilising a united student voter bloc, with the power to influence political decision-making and elections/referendums. Voter registration drives were held across the country as part of the campaign, and this campaign was re-branded and re-launched in the run up to the local & European elections.

During the month of September across the country the national voter registration drive began. The aim of the drive was to inform students on national voter registration and get them registered on SERD (Student Electoral Registration Database) to keep them informed and engaged. USI and Member Unions worked together during Fresher Weeks and Clubs and Soc events to ensure students were registered to vote and also to inform them of their rights as a voter. The



drives took place in all Dublin, Southern Region and BMW colleges from September to December.

## Conradh na Gaeilge agus USI

There has been a longstanding collaboration between USI and Conradh na Gaeilge over the past 10 years on an ad-hoc basis. The two organisations would like an official relationship to be agreed, to recognise the progress made to date, to help identify and facilitate new developments in the future aspirations of the two organisations. Amongst other things, both organisations will work together to strengthen the national Irish Language Campaign.



## Say Something Report

The launch of the "Say Something" research study findings of students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault, took place today, Tuesday, 10th September at Trinity College, Dublin. Keynote speaker Senator Ivana Bacik launched the findings of the "Say Something" study along with Ellen O'Malley Dunlop, CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. USI conducted this research project with the support of Cosc (National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence). This unique research study is the first of its kind and scale in Ireland.



The report focused on the following areas; Unwanted Sexual Experiences, Physical Mistreatment, Harassment, Obsessive Behaviour and Information on Campus.

## Free Our Voice

USI National Council determined for USI to take a 'No' stance on the Seanad Referendum, and to call for wider political reform of both Chambers and our overall Parliamentary system. With the assistance of the Taskforce for Volunteering and Citizenship, USI put together proposals for political reform, in a policy document entitled 'Free Our Voice- Politics for the People'. This was launched at a press event held at Ringsend Community Centre.



## Data Protection Policy

Following a mandate from USI Congress 2013, the USI Data Protection Policy was developed and was passed unanimously at the National Council in September.

## Ploughing Championships

During the summer months the Ploughing Championships which was being held in Stradbally Co. Laois was identified as a great opportunity for USI to engage with young people from all across the country. Through collaborations with Macra na Feirme, USI secured a stall at the event. Over the course of the event USI was able to engage with hundreds of students from across the country and promote the work we do for the students of Ireland.

## Tá Gaeilge Agam

USI ordered 15,000 Irish Language bands for the organisation, to be distributed amongst our members in September 2013. These bands are extremely popular, and in high demand. USI has supplied these bands to our students' since 2010. The main propose of the bands is essentially to develop the idea of a new Fáinne for students. As a result of this incentive, more people have been involved in both Union organised Irish Language event, and Irish Language societies membership has increased immensely.

# SEPTEMBER



## **Locked Out**

USI worked with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) on the collaborative policy paper 'Locked Out- Investing In A Future For Youth'. Together we called for an end to the 'lock-out' of young people from the jobs market and proposed a range of measures to improve access to the workplace and enhance employment skills. Jointly, we presented the key aspects of this paper collaboratively at the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Education and Social Protection.

## **Part-time Officer Training**

Based on feedback from the 2012 training event we changed the format of Part Time Officer training to regional events. These were hosted in IT Tallaght and UCC in September and GMIT in January covering topics including public speaking, chairing meetings, time management, planning events and equality campaigning.

## **ESC26 Lithuania**

The 26<sup>th</sup> European Students' Convention was hosted in Kaunas, Lithuania in September. The theme of the conference was 'The Internationalisation of the Higher Education Area' and the delegates drafted a response to the EU Commissions Communiqué on the topic. The USI delegation included sabbatical officers from IT Sligo SU, Letterkenny IT SU and UCC SU with the USI VP Academic Affairs & Quality Assurance.

## **SUSI Campus Tour**

Throughout September and October SUSI representatives held campus clinics across the country. As the closing date was also moved to a month earlier and great advancements were made in developing internal structures there were very few issues with SUSI this year in comparison with last year. The campus clinics provided one to one contact for students with queries and concerns which allowed the speedy resolution of issues.



# OCTOBER

## National Day of Action

The National Day of Action was rolled out in three regional locations on October 1st; - Sligo, Cork and Dublin. In Dublin the demo took place outside the Dáil, in Cork the demo travelled from UCC down Grand Parade to Main St. and in Sligo the demonstration travelled from IT Sligo to Stephen's St. Car park. Nearly 5,000 students across the country gathered to oppose the cuts to the Maintenance grant and rising cost of college. Students gathered with a united voice, and the media coverage of the events was strong, positive and on message. Ahead of the second USI pre-Budget meeting with Minister Quinn the following day in Leinster House, the Day of Action succeeded in bringing us closer to realising our goals.

A range of creative designs and digital marketing materials were used to engage students and stakeholders with the campaign. This included a social media strategy, online sponsored posts, an infographic, the SERD database, a Thunderclap, the DearDeputy microsite, flyers for students, parents and businesses, badges, poster designs and a full online toolkit that could be downloaded. Along the way, the campaign was aided by a very strong and strategic media message and presence. In



the week before the Budget alone, the USI President wrote opinion pieces for the country's two leading broadsheet newspapers, the Irish Times and the Irish Independent.

The "Fight for Your Future Now" utilised two main channels of communication: online and traditional media outlets. Online: USI Social Media Pages (Facebook and Twitter), [www.usi.ie/yourfuture](http://www.usi.ie/yourfuture) campaign site, email newsletter, social news sites and [www.usi.ie](http://www.usi.ie) main website. Traditional: Print, Broadcast and Radio.





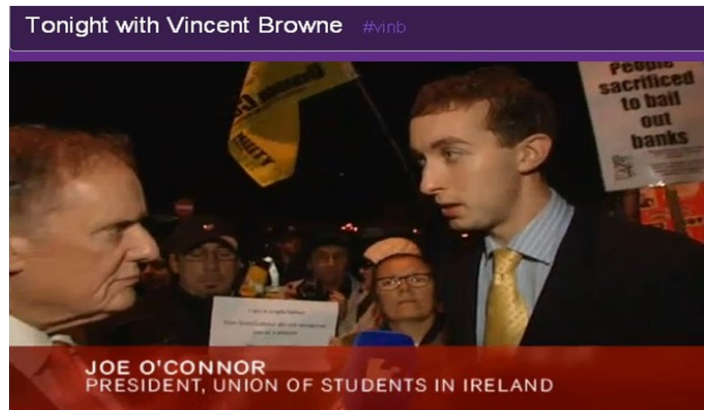


During the Campaign: USI and Member Students' Unions appeared in over 150 National and Regional media outlets, on multiple occasions. As well as communicating the "Fight For Your Future Now", issues such as accommodation problems for students, campaigns like 'Say Something', the Seanad Referendum 'Free Our Voice' proposal paper, USI Pre- Budget submission, Joint Position Paper with ICTU and ISSU 'Investing in a future that Works' to solve Youth Unemployment and the Guide to Student Life all got as high level of media attention. Below are some samples of the coverage received for the duration of the campaign.

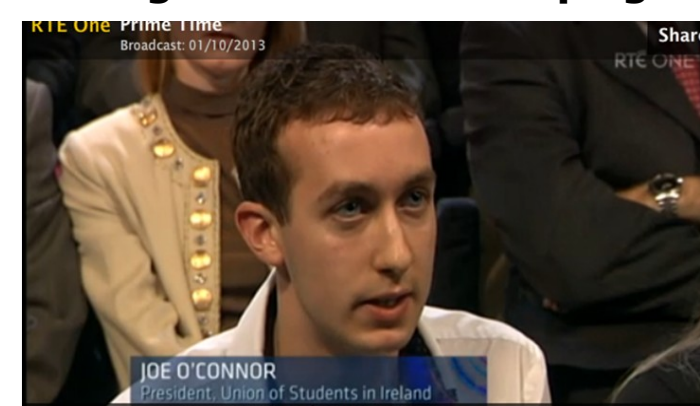
## National Day of Action



## Budget Day



## During the National Campaign







## Irish students take to the streets to protest against cuts

Austerity kids: young people in Ireland are demonstrating against education cuts and rising student fees. One student on the march tells Channel 4 News about the "mental strain" of having no money.

## Cork INDEPENDENT Students demand their future



## NEWS FOCUS STUDENTS PROTEST OV The Sligo Champion



## Fighting for their future

2,000 students take to the streets to protest over cuts to grants

## Irish Independent



## Students call for 'protection' from spiralling costs and grant cutbacks

Emma Jane Hade and Ralph Riegel

STUDENTS across the country failed to allow the rain to dampen their spirits as they gathered in their masses to protest over cutbacks to grants and spiralling education costs. Thousands gathered in Dublin, Cork and Sligo to demonstrate as part of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) 'Fight For Your Future Now' campaign.

Emotions were high outside Leinster House in Dublin where almost 1,000 students from Dublin and Mayohead heard

USI president Joe O'Connor describe the Government's cuts to student maintenance grants as "stupid economics". Speaking to the *Irish Independent* shortly before he took to the stage, Mr O'Connor said that the USI was calling on the Government to "protect" students in the upcoming Budget. "This isn't about students suffering any more. This is about any more cuts to the grant being an anti-family measure, and it doesn't make any economic sense for this Government to force any more students out of education."

He also called on the crowd to

vote No in Friday's upcoming Seanad abolition referendum. Tom Lenihan, son of the late finance minister Brian Lenihan, also spoke at the rally. The Trinity College Student Union president told the riled-up audience that he refused "to believe the bank of education is bust". Meanwhile, more than 1,000 students from all across Munster gathered in Cork at a rally led by the USI vice-president Ciara Guinan. "Students cannot sustain any further cutbacks. We are here today in solidarity to send a simple, clear message to the Government - we cannot take any more," Ms Guinan said.

## 3,000 students expected in Sligo as part of Fight For Your Future Now campaign

MORE than 3,000 third-level students are expected to flock to Sligo tomorrow (Tuesday) in support of one of the three regional protest marches, which are being organised by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) as part of the Fight for Your Future Now campaign. Additional marches will take place in Cork and Dublin on the same day. IT Sligo students will be joined by students from National University of Ireland, Galway, Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, GMIT Castletbar, Athlone Institute of Technology, St Angela's College in Sligo and Letterkenny

Institute of Technology. The students will link up at IT Sligo Students' Union and march into Sligo town in a show of defiance in the wake of recent speculation regarding additional cuts to the maintenance grants in addition to the expected rise in the Student Contribution Fee. Speaking at a meeting with the USI Border, Midlands and Western Area Officer Kevin Donoghue, IT Sligo Students' Union President Paul Smith said: "Since 1996 we have seen 15 increases from the initial Student Service Charge of €190, to the Student Contribution Charge of €2,250 in 2013 which is set to rise again this year by another €250. Tomorrow is our day to send a very clear message to this Government that students in Ireland have a voice, that we will not be silenced, that we will prevail and that we are the future of this country."

## SligoWeekender

## 3,000 students set to march

On Thursday night, October 1, around 3,000 students are expected to flock to Sligo to participate in one of three regional protest marches over the cost of education. The marches are being organised by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) as part of the 'Fight for Your Future Now' campaign. Additional marches will take place in Cork and Dublin on the same day as part of this national day of action. For the Sligo march, IT Sligo students will be joined by students from St Angela's College in Sligo, NUI Galway, GMIT Castletbar and

Letterkenny. The students will link up at IT Sligo Students' Union and march into Sligo town in a show of defiance in the wake of recent speculation regarding additional cuts to the maintenance grants in addition to the expected rise in the Student Contribution Fee. Speaking at a meeting with the USI Border, Midlands and Western Area Officer Kevin Donoghue, IT Sligo Students' Union President Paul Smith said: "Since 1996 we have seen 15 increases from the initial Student Service Charge of €190, to the Student Contribution Charge of €2,250 in 2013 which is set to rise again this year by another €250. Tomorrow is our day to send a very clear message to this Government that students in Ireland have a voice, that we will not be silenced, that we will prevail and that we are the future of this country."



By Claire Quinn

WEARING black t-shirts emblazoned with a resilient message to fight for your future close on 400 students from Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) joined 3,000 students from across the country for a protest rally in Cork.

The nationwide 'Fight for Your Future Now' demonstrations took place last Tuesday against potential cuts to the maintenance grant and the rumoured €100m cuts to education in the forthcoming Budget 2014.

Students from WIT, CIT, IT Tralee, LIT Carrigrohane, Carlow College, UCC and IT Carlow came together to express their collective

voice. The march began in University College Cork (UCC) and finished in Cork city where speeches from representatives of each student union, including WIT, were delivered to a large crowd of students. Stephen O'Rourke said, "WIT students joined students from other ITs and third level institutes to march through the streets of Cork and voice our concerns and frustrations collectively." Among the reasons why the WIT students took part were cuts in grants, a rise in cost of attending college and youth unemployment. The Student Union President said at the event was WIT Welfare Offi-

cer Christina Fitzharris, who addressed the crowd on the issue of student and graduate unemployment. "Like Christina all the other speakers got a great reaction from the crowd," Mr O'Rourke said. The SU president said no further action has been decided upon at this point in time, but added, "It depends on the outcome of the Budget." In the meantime Mr O'Rourke said he is inviting TDs in Waterford and across the South East to join him and other representatives at a meeting in Dublin this Wednesday to discuss the Budget and the potential impact cuts in education will have on students in third level education.



Pictured are WIT students taking part in the 'Fight for Your Future Now' demonstration in Cork

## SUNDAY BUSINESS POST

## 'Less obvious' budget cuts a worry for families

Interest groups are wary of budget provisions that might harm their ability to make ends

AS October 15 looms, households, students, the elderly and the unemployed are keen to find out just how much this year's budget will affect their situation. All the signals seem to indicate that the headline rates on welfare benefits will be untouched in this budget, but interest groups are still concerned that this could change during the final budget negotiations this weekend. And, if the headline rates are left alone, where else will the cuts be made? Struggling households are concerned about changes to subsidiary benefits, with speculation, for example, that the eligibility criteria for some benefits could be tightened.

Recent budgets have had a big impact on families with young children. We've seen the introduction of a tax on maternity benefits from mid-2013, cuts to child benefit and reduced financial support for back-school costs. And families have also been hit by broader measures, such as PRSI increases and the introduc-

ing into this budget," O'Connor said, adding that she hoped the government would take account of this when finalising their budget plans. **Students** The government has already announced that the student contribution, a charge paid by third-level students, will rise by €250 per year in 2014 and 2015, taking it to €43,000 per year. Last year's budget introduced a 3 per cent reduction in the income threshold for entitlement to student grants, with students concerned that more cuts are looming. In a blog post last week, the president of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), Joe O'Connor, said that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were "struggling to deal with the constrained economic climate, increasing costs

"Our grants system is deeply flawed, deeply insufficient for the poorest in our society, and in dire need of reform. It remains, however, the one thing that manages to keep tens of thousands of our best and brightest off the long queue to become the highly-skilled, highly-qualified graduates our economy relies on," he said. "That is why it is vitally important that having been targeted in four consecutive budgets, the student maintenance grant is fully protected in both the rate and the threshold." O'Connor said that higher education should be viewed not as public spending, but as "public investment". **Older people** Reports last week suggested that the state pension will escape the axe in this year's budget, but other supports, such as the household benefits package may not be so lucky. "We're very worried that cuts will be made with a short-term view," said Peter Kavanagh, a spokesman for Active Retirement Ireland (ARI). "Any cuts to the household benefits package would reduce income and in turn, reduce the ability of some of our members to stay in their own homes." "We've received a commitment from the minister on five times," Kavanagh said. He described supports such as that as a "vote-buying exercise" for the government, as they allow older people to stay in their community. ARI, a charity for older adults, has said that any cut to the state pension would be detrimental to the lives of older people. "Our mem-

## THE IRISH TIMES

## Students call on Government to tackle youth unemployment

THIRD LEVEL students from across the west of Ireland are calling on the government to tackle the youth employment and emigration problems that Ireland has been experiencing the past few years. The colleges NUI Galway, Galway, GMIT (Galway-Mayo Institute of Tech-

united met at Knock Airport. They organised a photo stunt to hammer home the message to the government that emigration is an issue that needs to be sorted before more of the youth of Ireland leave to find employment that they just cannot get in Ireland. Kevin Donoghue, Vice

ous issue for people of all ages. As many as two hundred people are leaving this country every day, and are taking their skills with them. USI's pre-budget submission calls on the government to make a significant investment in the youth guarantee to avoid continuation of trends like this.

Ireland in search of work elsewhere. With over 30% of under-25s being unemployed investment in the youth guarantee will go a long way towards closing the generation gap that has begun to emerge in Irish society. Young people want to live and work in Ireland but a lack of action on behalf of the government

## Campaign Results

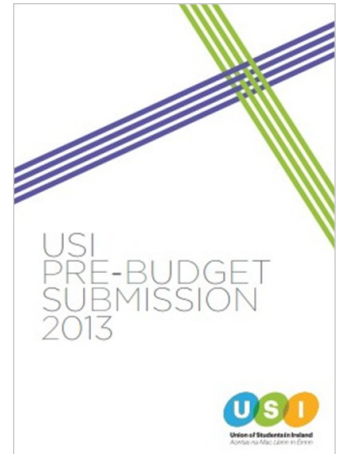
- The Student Maintenance Grant was not cut in Budget 2014, the first time in four consecutive budgets.
- The BTEA was protected with minimal changes.
- Increase of student voting registrations across the country with SERD.
- The European Youth Guarantee obtained initial investment of €14 million.



# OCTOBER

## Pre-Budget Submission

USI set about agreeing a pragmatic and achievable set of objectives, which would aim to protect the most financially vulnerable students. The Pre-Budget Submission was crafted around these key goals. In the context of our economic and political circumstances, with another €3.1 billion austerity adjustment and further Education cutbacks required, the results achieved for students were hugely significant. The core student support payments - the student maintenance grant and the Back to Education Allowance, were protected in full after several years of contraction.



## Pre-Budget Briefing

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, a final Pre-Budget Briefing was organised in Buswells' Hotel. USI reiterated the core points of the Pre-Budget Submission and campaign objectives, and several students shared their personal stories. This was attended by over 50 members of the Oireachtas, which was an excellent turnout. Intelligence from the Department suggests they received representations from 10 TDs on the student grant that afternoon alone. This was a highly effective campaign event which provided the final push required for the campaign to succeed.

## Seanad Referendum

USI were heavily engaged in the media discussion on the Seanad referendum throughout the campaign, including as part of a live debate on The Pat Kenny Show on Newstalk, and as a contributor to the special Prime Time debate on the Seanad referendum. On polling day, USI utilised the SERD database and communications tool for the first time, encouraging thousands of students to get out and vote and informing them of USI's position. Throughout the campaign, USI advocated for a 'No' vote and the



proposition to abolish Seanad Éireann was defeated by a small margin on polling day.

## Bodywhys Survey

USI strengthened its relationship with Bodywhys and assisted them in the promotion of a survey which would look at young adults' knowledge of eating disorders and their impressions of individuals with eating disorders.

## Irish Language Training

More than 100 students, from across the country participated in the annual Irish Language Training weekend, which took place in DIT for the first time. The Secretary General of Conradh na Gaeilge, the Vice President Gaeilge, and the Irish Language Commissioner all gave presentations, and workshops to the students who attended the seminar. The weekend consisted of workshops on Irish Language Rights, How to organise events through Irish, How to organise a Cumann Gaelach, and How to be an effective Irish Language Officer.

## USI/Irish Times/Gael Linn All Ireland Debating Competition

The team from UCC won the Annual USI/Irish Times All-Ireland debating competition, held at Oireachtas na Samhna in Killarney in November. The team of Lára Ní Dhálaigh and Deidre Ní Dhonnachadh, from the Cuallacht (Cumann Gaelach) UCC, beat off stiff competition from teams from around the country. Teams from NUIG, UU Magee and UCD represented their colleges at the final. The topic for the debate was 'Ba chóir deireadh iomlán a chur le hÍocaíochtaí dól do dhaoine faoi 25 bliain d'aois' (All dole payments to under 25's should be stopped!).



## Oireachtas na Samhna

Oireachtas na Samhna, the annual arts festival of Irish culture, took place in the Gleneagle Hotel, Killarney. In recent years, the festival has had a significant student attendance. Events such as Corn Uí Riada, the All-Ireland Sean-Nós singing competition, and Steip, the All-Ireland Sean-Nós dancing Competition, are the highlights of the weeklong festival. Student orientated events also take place, including the "Cabaret Craicáilte", which is USI's largest social event for students, with over 600 students from across the country attending. USI provide discounted entry for members along with help in finding suitable accommodation, to ensure maximum student participation.



## Class Rep Training

Throughout October, members of USI Officer Board attended and presented at Class Rep Training events. Colleges across Ireland hosted these events. Class Representatives were informed of USI structures, campaigns, and the pre-budget campaign and how they could get involved.

## International Student's Focus Group

USI co-organised and facilitated a focus group for international students in TCD on October 22nd with the Irish Council for International Students. The event was very successful and we received detailed feedback to our questions on their experiences in Ireland and how things could be improved for them. The feedback was presented to the Government as part of the review of Ireland's International Education Strategy. Similar events took place in NUI Galway and UCC.





# NOVEMBER

## **Pink Training**

Pink Training took place the weekend of the 22nd-24th of November in Queen's University Belfast. This event was particularly special as it was the 21st anniversary of Pink Training. USI held a 21st anniversary dinner, a variety of workshops and a rally for LGBTQ rights.

Delegations of students attend Pink Training from USI-affiliated colleges across the country. The event consists of training modules on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. The event is the largest of its kind in Europe for third-level students



and continues to be one of the most popular, and the largest training events, USI runs in terms of attendees. Over 350 delegates attended and it was a great success which included a keynote address from Jeff Dudgeon, MBE, LGBT advocate and campaigner against discrimination in Northern Ireland.

## **QQI Anniversary**

Quality and Qualification Ireland was established in November 2012. In their first year they undertook a comprehensive policy review including papers on topics such as introducing and International Education Mark, the protection of enrolled learners and a review on institutional reviews in Higher Education. USI has a good relationship with QQI, holding a seat on the Board and being a part of the Consultative Forum, a stakeholder group which meets bi-annually.

## **Teaching Heroes Think Tank**

On November 5th the National Forum for Teaching and Learning collaborated with USI to host a Teaching Heroes Think Tank. The aim of this was to design a student led, student nominated awards system for excellent teachers who have a great impact on students. This was launched in January and rolled across colleges in the Spring. Teaching Heroes from each college will be recognised at a ceremony next September with Mary McAlesse in the Printworks Conference Centre, Dublin Castle.

## **ESU BM65 Croatia**

USI is a member of ESU (European Students' Union) and has two votes at the biannual Board meetings (BM). The 65th BM took place from November 29th to December 1st. The lengthy agenda included a policy paper on Higher Education Governance, a Manifesto for the EU Elections and motions submitted by member unions. USI attended every session and submitted a number of motions and resolutions. USI also met with other national unions from all over Europe to share initiatives and ideas.

## **Drinkaware Disaffiliation**

After many years of debating on the topic, USI officially ended any future work with Drinkaware.ie and MEAS in November. The motion was passed without objection at USI National Council, held in the Dublin Institute of Technology on the 9th of November.

## Joint Campaigns

USI is an affiliate organisation of the 'We're Not Leaving' campaign group, which brings together students, young workers and the young unemployed. USI have organised with them on a number of issues, including the 'Young People's Assembly' held in Liberty Hall which USI was a full supporter and participant in. USI assisted with the organisation and promotion of this event, as well as its delivery on the day.

A Post-Budget campaign in opposition to the cuts to social welfare payments in Budget 2014 was launched alongside We're Not Leaving,



SpunOut.ie, and the National Youth Council of Ireland. This included several photo stunts, media pressure and a targeted lobby of Senators ahead of the Social Welfare Bill.

## More Talk More Action & Chats for Change

Former Rugby star and mental health advocate, Alan Quinlan launched USI's national mental health campaign to get Irish students talking about mental health in November.

In partnership with Lyons Tea, See Change and St Patrick's Mental Health Services, 20,000 'Chats for Change' packs were distributed across college campuses nationwide. The packs included a banner pen with tips on how to start the conversation and useful links, 2 tea bags and a card to explain the campaign. The 'More Talk, More Action' Campus Tour visited NCI, Cork IT, NUI Maynooth and Athlone IT with a message for students to talk more about mental health and take more action for their wellbeing. The campus tour included interactive/



educational information stands and expert advice from See Change, Mental Health Reform, Headstrong, Headsup, Reachout.com, Turn2me.org, PleaseTalk.org, Mental Health Ireland and St Patrick's Mental Health Services.

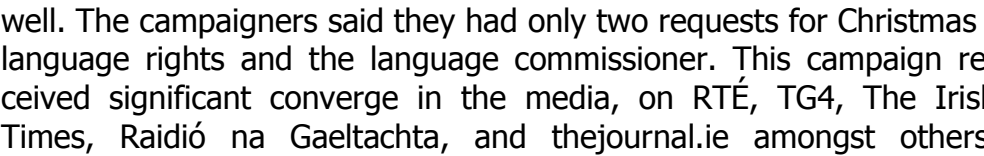
## HEA How Equal? Conference

On November 7th, USI attended the HEA's How Equal? Access to Education conference in Kilmainham. The USI President, VP for Equality and Citizenship and VP for Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance attended along with many MO officers. USI had met with the HEA Equity of Access Office several times prior to the conference to ensure that the schedule included the student voice. At the event itself, USI Officers spoke to the Minister for Education and Skills on equity of access to higher education.



Members of the USI wore red tape across their mouths at a protest outside Leinster House demanding that the Government acts on its legal obligations to give Irish language speakers equality in their right to engage with the State through Irish. Red tape across their mouths represented the failure of the State to allow them to speak their own language.

The resignation of the Irish Language commissioner at this time showed how unsupportive the Government has been. Previous governments were slightly successful in their attempts at resurrecting the language, however the current government have not been promoting the Irish language



USI collaborated with Dublin AIDS Alliance, SpunOut.ie and the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme with support from HSE Health Promotion and HSE Public Health Department Eastern Region on a new Gonorrhoea information and prevention campaign in response to noted increases of Gonorrhoea in Ireland. 'OMG...Gonorrhoea...It's Trending' #OMGSTI was developed which targeted young (heterosexual) people aged 17 to 25 years through social media. An information booklet on Gonorrhoea was produced as well as posters and the main campaign website is [www.yoursexualhealth.ie](http://www.yoursexualhealth.ie)





### GMIT Referendum

The referendum was held on December 5<sup>th</sup> alongside a constitutional overhaul in the member organisation. The campaign started the previous Thursday with the USI BMW Officer and sabbatical officers from GMIT attending a Class Rep Council and campaigning in Letterfrack campus. The USI team campaigned up until the close of voting on Thursday returning a 95% yes vote in the referendum. The result reflected the positive attitude amongst membership in GMIT to the work done by USI. In addition to campaigning it was very rewarding to speak to members of the organisation on the issues that concerned and affected them.

### ISSE Launch

The ISSE pilot survey, co-sponsored by HEA, IOTI, IUA and USI was completed in September 2013 and the report launched in December with the support of the Department of Education and Skills. The pilot showed many very useful findings in the student experience and resulted in a very rich data set. Improvements for 2014 were suggested and methodologies for improving response rates examined.



### USI Student Finance Survey

USI has worked with Amárach Research to update the Student Finance Survey and launched it on social media over the Christmas period with support from the USI Communications and Research Executive. We received over 1,100 responses nationally. The findings gave great insight into how students are financing their education and how this affects their mental wellbeing.

SUT WIT



GAA Emigration Campaign Launch at SUT

Volunteering and Citizen Taskforce

Pro-Choice Rally

Migrant Fee Arrangements

Guide to Student Life

Community Engagement

USI National Charity

Letter to Russian Embassy

Top Up Training

Crossover Tour

SUSI Deadline

Voter Registration Drives

Ploughing Championships

Say Something Report

Part Time Officer

Locked Out Launch

Conradh na Gaeilge

SUSI Campus Tour

ESC26 Lithuania

Tá Gaeilge Agam

Fresher's Packs

SERD



Free Our Voice

Gaeilge Training

Seanad Referendum

International Students

Class Rep Training

Drinkaware Disaffiliation

Youth Unemployment

Oireachtas na Samhna



National Day of Action

Pre Budget Briefing

Budget 2014

USI/Irish Times Debate



More Talk, More Action

HEA How Equal?

ESU BM65 Croatia

QQI Anniversary

Teaching Heroes



Pink Training 2013



Language Rights

USI Joint Campaigns



March for Marriage

JULY

AUGUST

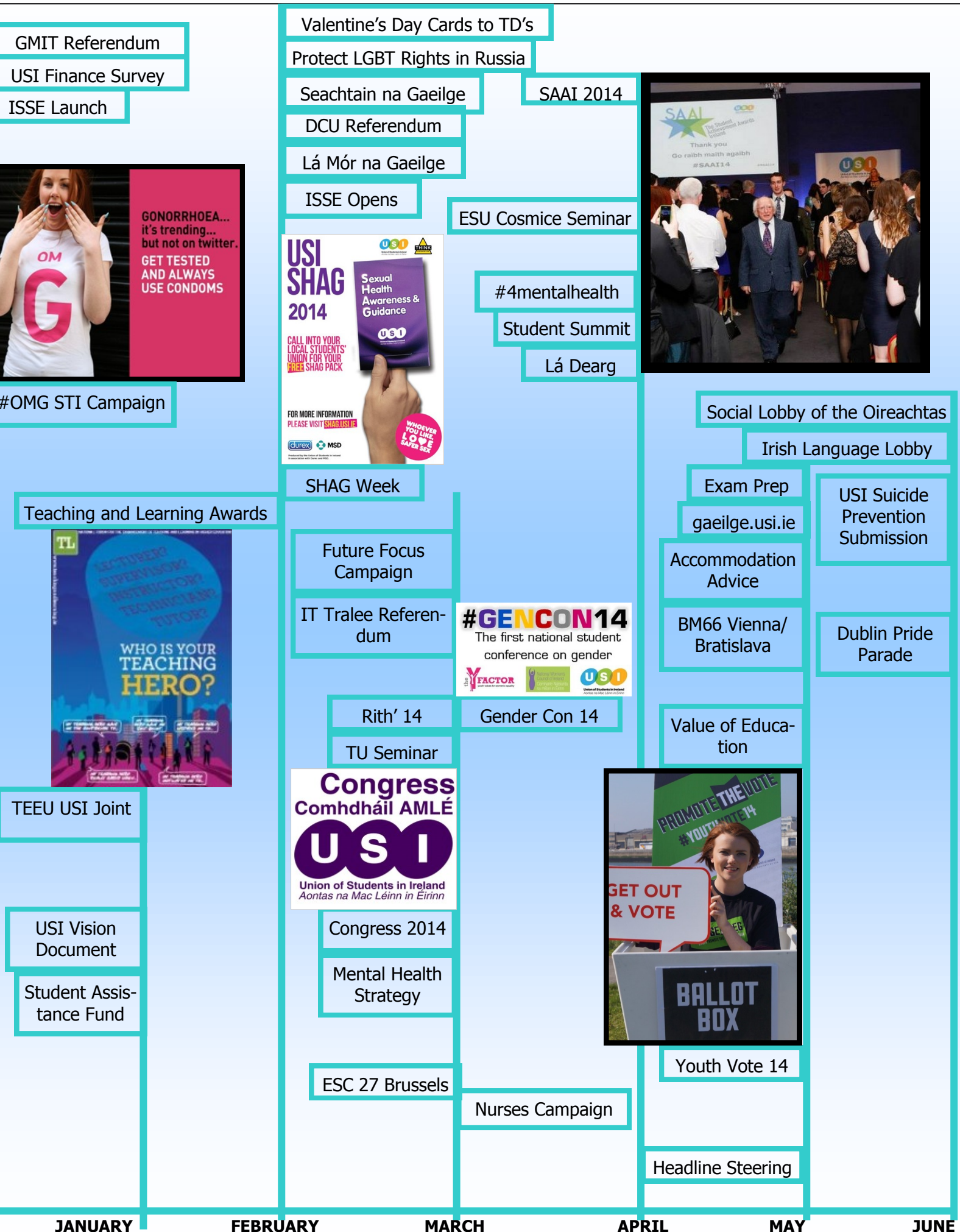
SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER





# PRESS CLIPPINGS 2013-2014

## Gardaí gave 'misleading' information to Ombudsman on student protest

The Ombudsman was investigating complaints about the behaviour of four gardaí at the protest in 2



## SUNDAY WORLD.com YOUR WORLD, EVERY DAY

### Brain drain means future success for New York, London and Sydney warns USI

Thursday 18th July 2013

## GalwayCityTribune

## Student leaders highlight the hard Knocks facing college graduates

BY JESSICA THOMPSON

STUDENTS from colleges across the west of Ireland came together at Knock Airport this week to highlight the scale of the emigration and unemployment problem facing a generation of young graduates. And they are demanding that the government tackle this twin crisis hitting them harder than most.

"It is a pertinent issue that the government needs to address, there is no future in this country without the youth of today," said NUI Galway Student Union President, Sean Kearns.

The crowd of students at the airport included representatives from NUI Galway, Galway-Mayno Institute of Technology (GMIT), IT Sligo, St Angela's Sligo, Athlone IT and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

Dressed as doctors, nurses, builders, chefs, footballers and workers from various other professions, the students posed for photos at the airport.



Students from all over the West of Ireland gathered at Knock Airport to highlight the problem of emigration. Among them were NUI Galway SU Vice President for Welfare Declan Higgins (third from left), NUI Galway SU President Sean Kearns (third from left) and NUI Galway SU Vice President for Education (third from right).

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## BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP

HOME BUSINESS EXPORTING LEADERSHIP MARKETING APPOINTMENTS SMALL BUSINESS REPORTS EVENTS VIO

### USI launches Guide To Student Life

26.08.2013

Categories: Finance, Education

Tags:

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5+1 0 + more

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) has launched a new Guide To Student Life today in Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), National University of Galway (NUIG) and Institute of Technology Carlow (IT Carlow) with support from the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB).



Thousands of guides are to be distributed to students across Ireland to help them manage their money effectively, know their rights and settle into college life.

Easy-to-use budget sheets and rent book logs are included, enabling students to keep weekly or monthly budgets that will help monitor their income and expenditure and keep a record of net pay.



## THE IRISH TIMES USI calls for No vote and end of economic council

ÉANNÁ Ó CAOLLAÍ

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) has called for a No vote in the referendum on abolishing the Seanad.

Its president, Joe O'Connor, said a No vote would represent "a mandate for real reform of the Seanad as opposed to retaining it as it currently stands".

The union, which represents some 200,000 students of voting age, yesterday set out a number of proposals it said would reform the political system. It called for the abolition of the Government's four-member

Economic Management Council (EMC) which decides economic policy decisions.

Mr O'Connor said it was "very, very clear" that the introduction of the EMC, with its "unelected advisers", was at odds with the Government's aim of promoting open democracy.

Abolishing it would go "an awful lot further" to fixing the "broken democracy" in this country than the abolition of the Seanad.

USI also called for votes for all graduates in Seanad elections, an emigrant panel, and a lowering of the voting age to 16.



Almost one in five experience some form of sexual harassment, including harassment, sexual violence and sexual assault, according to a survey of 1,000 students across the country. The survey, conducted by the National Student Union (NSU), found that 18 per cent of students had experienced sexual harassment, 12 per cent had experienced sexual violence, and 10 per cent had experienced sexual assault. The survey also found that 18 per cent of students had experienced sexual harassment, 12 per cent had experienced sexual violence, and 10 per cent had experienced sexual assault.

## Irish Independent USI fears youth scheme may be 'token gesture'

CHRISTOPHER MCKINLEY

The president of the Union of Students in Ireland has said there is a concern the Government is making only a "token gesture" when it comes to the youth guarantee scheme.

Speaking yesterday after the launch of an alternative plan to tackle Ireland's youth unemployment, Joe O'Connor said there was a real concern that "there's a small amount of investment put in and that it's essentially an extension of an existing scheme".

At Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) together with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Irish Second Level

Students' Union called for an end to the "lockout" of young people from the workforce. The organisations' proposals, outlined in a joint publication *Locked Out? Investing in a Future for Youth*, include a major investment in the youth guarantee, which would ensure a job, apprenticeship or study placement for every young person within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

A new national skills map - to identify shortages in different sectors and locations - as well as a new skills agency, career information service and a legal framework for work placements are among new measures proposed.

The search began in University of Galway (UG) and finished in Cork City where speakers from representatives of Irish students, including WIT, were delivered a letter to the President of WIT's Student Union, Stephen O'Rourke, said, "WIT is a proud member of the group of Irish second level institutions to march through the streets of Cork and voice our concerns and frustrations collectively."

Among the reasons why the WIT students took part were cost in terms of a second of attending college and youth unemployment. The Student Union President said among the representatives to speak at the event was WIT President O'Rourke.

## Hundreds of WIT students

By Claire Quinn

WEARING black t-shirts emblazoned with a red and white message, hundreds of WIT students took part in a protest on Tuesday.

The nationwide "Fight for Youth" demonstration took place last Tuesday against potential cuts in the forthcoming Budget and the continued €100m cuts to education in the forthcoming Budget.

Students from WIT, CIT, IT Tallaght, LIT Carrigrohane, Galway College, UCC and IT Carlow came together to express their collective

concern. The march began in University of Galway (UG) and finished in Cork City where speakers from representatives of Irish students, including WIT, were delivered a letter to the President of WIT's Student Union, Stephen O'Rourke, said, "WIT is a proud member of the group of Irish second level institutions to march through the streets of Cork and voice our concerns and frustrations collectively."

Among the reasons why the WIT students took part were cost in terms of a second of attending college and youth unemployment. The Student Union President said among the representatives to speak at the event was WIT President O'Rourke.

Christina Fitzpatrick, who addressed the crowd on the issue of student and graduate unemployment, said: "Like Christina all the other students get a great experience from the course," he O'Rourke said. "The WIT president said no further protest in time, but added, 'I depend on the outcome of the election'."

In the meantime Mr O'Rourke said he is inviting DIT to Waterford and across the South East to join him and other representatives at a meeting in Dublin this Wednesday to discuss the Budget and the potential impact cuts in education will have on students in third level education.



## Irish students take to the streets to protest against cuts

Austerity kids: young people in Ireland are demonstrating against education cuts and rising student fees. One student on the march tells Channel 4 News about the 'mental strain' of having no money.

News

## TD wants to 'save young from flat-screen TVs'

Michael Brennan  
Daily Political Editor

CONTROVERSIAL dole cuts will make sure young people are not watching a flat-screen television seven days a week, it was said.

The claim came as Taoiseach Enda Kenny said that the decision to cut dole payments from €144 to €90 for young people aged 23-24 was "not a cutting measure".

The opposition has warned the current fee rises are young people to emigrate. However, there is a danger of Labour backbenchers demanding a U-turn.

Labour TD Eamon Maloney said there had been a consistent message from parents in his Dublin South West constituency - which has the highest level of youth unemployment in the country.

"Parents will tell you that they do not want their children at home watching a flat-screen television seven days a week," he said.

Mr Maloney said parents wanted the Government to give young people the chance of accessing work, education or training instead of staying on the dole.

Following Labour TD Jeanine Turley, who is the chair of the Dail's youth protection committee, said there had been members in the Budget to force more training places for young people on the dole.

"We have to ensure that young people don't get caught up in the trap of long-term unemployment," he said.

The dole rate for those aged 23 to 24 will drop from €144 to €90 - but both cuts will only apply to new claimants.

Meanwhile, the website of the party's Youth Wing - Labour Youth - crashed after it posted

statements strongly criticising the dole cuts. Following speculation that the website had been taken down by the party because of the criticism, the Labour press office was forced to confirm that the crash was accidental.

Overall, TDs from both Labour and Fine Gael reported a very muted reaction to the Budget, with far fewer phone calls and emails than last year.

But the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) warned that the latest dole cuts could force more young people to emigrate at a time of massive youth unemployment.

Eamon Maloney said the decision to slash dole for people aged 23-24 was not a benefit cut.

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## THE IRISH TIMES Students body withdraws from DrinkAware initiative

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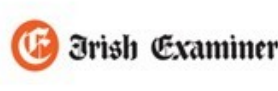
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**g. Gaelport.com**  
Príomhshuíomh eolais na Gaeilge  
Irish language news and information

## Social media used to fight 'trending' gonorrhoea



## Christmas wish list: language rights





# JANUARY

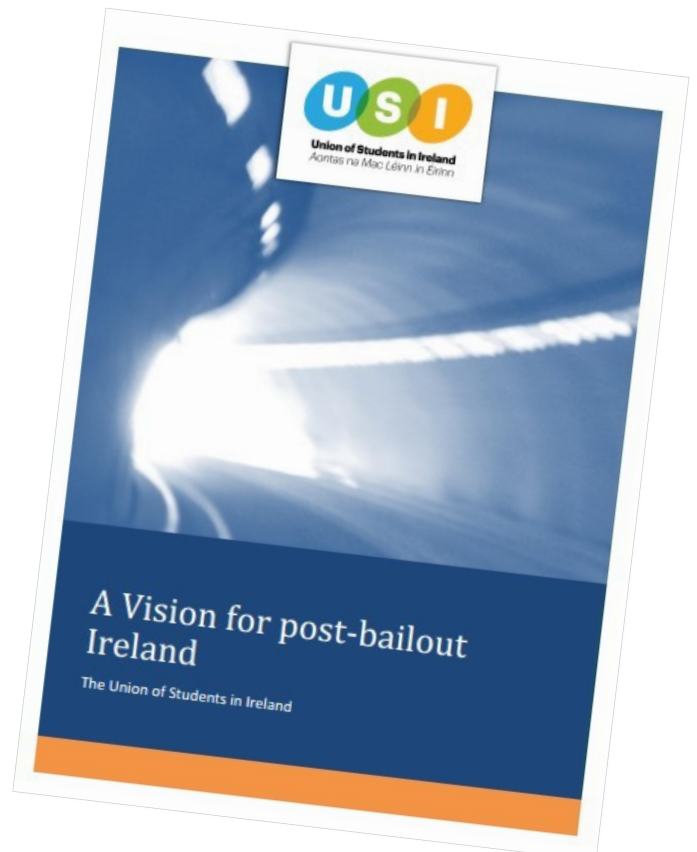
## Teaching Heroes Awards Launch

The National Forum for Teaching and Learning launched the Student Led 'Teaching Hero' Awards in Higher Education. These Awards recognise and celebrate students' experiences of great teaching throughout all higher education institutions. The launch was accompanied by the announcement that Prof Mary McAleese will provide invaluable support as the first official Patron of the National Forum. The Forum's mission is to work in collaboration with all higher education institutions to enhance the quality of the learning experience for students. These awards provide students with the opportunity to nominate teachers, who have demonstrated excellence in their teaching and impacted their students' lifelong learning.



## USI Vision for Post Bail out Ireland

USI set out a vision for Post-Bailout Ireland in January. Exiting the Bailout Programme marked an important step in Ireland's recovery. While severe short-term and long-term challenges remain, we began the conversation on the Ireland of tomorrow. USI envisages actions that the Government should take in order for Ireland to get back on its feet post-bailout. Included in the vision statement were: Commit to properly fund Higher Education, take action to address the Youth Unemployment crisis, reform the political system, a living wage, budgeting for equality, legislate for collective bargaining in all industries, relieve mortgage debt on hard-pressed families, scrap the waste in public spending, tackle the cost of living by controlling rent and improving social housing and invest in Community Mental Health services.





### Technological Universities Quality Framework Conference

The Technological Universities Quality Framework project (TUQF), in which all 14 Institutes of Technology are participating, will contribute to the formation of the quality ethos of these new entities, as well as providing practical guidelines for quality, and for upholding academic standards in the reconfigured Irish higher education landscape. The conference made a significant contribution to the TUQF initiative by supporting the development of a strong and collaborative Technology sector within the broader higher education system, which draws upon the considerable accumulated expertise and talent within the sector.

The conference provided an update on the TUQF project and addressed a number of key quality-related themes including Learning and Teaching, the Voice of the Student, and Structures for Quality. A panel of external stakeholders, from a range of sectors, also discussed the quality of higher education from the varied perspectives of industry, as well as community and professional bodies.

### Student Assistance Fund

In response to ongoing demand pressures on the Student Assistance Fund causing significant student hardship, USI made representations for additional funds to be made available through the Higher Education Authority. We were successful in securing a limited amount of additional funding through accrued interest in the HEA Budget, and leftover monies in the Strategic Investment Development Fund (SIDF).

### TEEU USI Joint Campaign

Budget 2014 announced that apprentices would be required to pay a pro rata student contribution charge. In January student apprentices were informed that the fee was changed from €833 to €1400 and to be paid immediately. USI joined with the TEEU to campaign against the charge and was invited to speak at a press conference on January 10th.



# FEBRUARY

## Protect LGBT Rights in Russia

The USI, Students' Unions and student LGBTQ societies demonstrated outside the Russian Embassy in Dublin on February 5th). Over 50 people travelled to show solidarity and fight for human rights. The demonstration took place two days before the Winter Olympic Games commenced in Sochi. Organisers of the demonstration wished Irish athletes the very best of luck in the Games. The demonstration showed our solidarity with Russian LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) people.



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## DCU Referendum

Throughout the year, USI had engaged with DCU Students' Union on an ongoing basis ahead of a re-run of last year's 'null and void' referendum which was held. A considerable amount of effort and preparation went in to ensuring that this referendum was held and passed. In the end, by the slimmest of majorities, DCU students voted to re-join USI 13 years after their disaffiliation.

## Lá Mór na Gaeilge

As many as 5,000 people took part in a protest outside Leinster House in Dublin City Centre calling for increased government support for the Irish language.

By not providing services through Irish, they are essentially putting out the message that our National Language has no importance. People across the country marched for the future of the Irish Language. Language rights are Human Rights.



## ISSE Opens

As many issues were identified with the 2013 pilot of the ISSE (Irish Survey of Student Engagement) there were many changes for the 2014 roll out. A new brand was developed by the Communications Working Group, an external company was awarded the tender to co-ordinate the technical side and the timing was changed to allow each college to pick a three week window to collect responses. Overall response rates improved and the analysis of the data and report drafting will continue over the summer months.



## SHAG Week

USI launched its Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance (SHAG) campaign in February in collaboration with Think Contraception, Durex and MSD. The focus of the campaign is to promote positive attitudes towards sex and raise awareness to all aspects of sexual health.

45,000 'SHAG Packs' were distributed to students across Ireland. Each SHAG Pack contained a condom, sachet of lubricant and information about STI, contraception choices and general sexual health information.

The Sexual Health Education Roadshow visited NCI, GMIT, IT Carlow and DKIT. The roadshow was supported by Think Contraception, Irish Family Planning Association, Dublin Aids Alliance,



HSE's Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Cura, Here2help, AidsWest, Cope Galway, and the Rape Crisis Network Ireland.

## Valentine's Cards to TDs

USI sent Valentine's Day cards to all TDs on the 14th of February highlighting the need for marriage equality in Ireland. We wished them a Happy Valentine's Day and asked them to support Marriage Equality in 2015. The message on the card read: "Love is love. We hope you will support USI's call for marriage equality in early 2015".

## Student Sport Ireland Committee

USI expanded its relationship with Student Sport Ireland (SSI) and secured a seat for USI VP Welfare on the Health, Wellbeing and Physical Activity committee.

## Neknominations

As the online trend of Neknominations expanded on social media, USI launched #BreakTheChain as it had been described as the modern day chain letter. It was important to have the message online where the trend started to reach as many people as possible. Our campaign trended on social media within an hour and was widely shared online and through traditional media outlets.

## Seachtain na Gaeilge

The inaugural USI Seachtain na Gaeilge took place this February. It was launched in Club Conradh na Gaeilge with an Irish version of 'Take Me Out' taking place involving Cumann Gaelacha from DCU, DIT, TCD and Maynooth. Over the fortnight Céilithe, Irish Classes and other events as Gaeilge took place in institutions across the country.



# MARCH

## IT Tralee Referendum

Due to the procedure laid out in their constitution IT Tralee Students' Union had to run a referendum on their membership to USI. It had been four years since they previously held a referendum and so the date was set for the 20th of March for students' to decide whether or not they wished to remain affiliated.

There was a strong referendum campaign held on both the North and South campuses in the week leading up to the referendum. The strong campaign and



support resulted in a resounding yes result with 95% of students' voting in favour to remain affiliated to USI.

## ESC 27 Brussels

The 27th ESC took place in Brussels, Belgium and the agenda included Graduate Employability and the voice of students in EU decision making. The VP for Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance led a delegation including officers from IADTSU, CITSU and DITSU. The delegates looked at how the EU Parliament and Commission operate and prepared the ESU European election campaign Vote for Education. A memorial ceremony was also held to recognise those who lost their lives during the recent violence in the Ukraine.

## Mental Health Strategy

Following a mandate at USI Congress 2013, the USI Mental Health Strategy was updated and passed unanimously at USI Congress 2014. Member Students' Union Welfare Officers and many mental health organisations supported the development of the strategy.

## Gender Conference 2014

The #GENCON14 event was the first of its kind and was supported by the National Women's Council's Y-Factor Project. The event was free of charge and took place on Friday February 28th until Saturday, March 1st. It featured modules on hetero-normativity, pro-choice activism, Transgender rights and health. It took place in NUIG and there were in excess of 70 people in attendance.





## Everyone Loves Nurses Campaign

In September 2013 USI undertook a motion to better represent student nurses and midwives. The issues affecting students included wages and working conditions while on placement on ward or graduate recruitment jobs. USI worked with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO), NUIG Students' Union & Student Unions' nationwide. The campaign launched on February 6th outside Dáil Éireann. Over fifty volunteers took part and USI liaised with several stakeholders before it started. Social media was the driving force behind recruiting students to attend the March 6th demonstration outside the HSE. Overall the final demonstration had 700 people attending, 5,000 campaign badges distributed in total



and positive media exposure for the campaign in the lead up to the Labour Relations Court meeting April 2nd.

## Future Focus

This year USI organised the first ever national 'Future Focus' campaign on employability and entrepreneurship, in partnership with HAYS Recruitment and Enterprise Ireland. This consisted of an employability roadshow which involved stalls and workshops on CV tips, interview techniques and social media, which was rolled out on campuses across the country. Additionally a graduate jobs microsite with HAYS offers employability tips to students, advice on workers' rights, and a graduate jobs platform was created.

## Seachtain na Gaeilge Náisiúnta

The annual Seachtain na Gaeilge festivities kicked off in Killarney this year. The festival lasted over two weeks in the lead up to St. Patrick's Day. Events during the festival included music sessions, speed-dating, and street céilís. Over 150,000 people took part including thousands of children from schools and youth clubs in Ireland. Every Cumann Gaelacha participated in the festivities also, by hosting different events across the country to re-



introduce young people to the Irish Language.

## TU Seminar

With the impending mergers between many Institutes of Technology across the country it was decided that we should take a proactive approach to preparing for such mergers. The first step in this process was to establish a Technological University Seminar which was to take place at National Council. The first of these was held in IT Tralee. The purpose of the seminars was to identify concerns and worries of National Council members regarding such mergers and to begin working toward resolutions.

## Rith 2014

Rith 2014 is a 1,000 km run throughout Ireland to celebrate the Irish language. Rith is a relay race organised in support of the Irish language. It was held for the first time in 2010 and coincided with Seachtain na Gaeilge. The third bi-annual Rith took place this year, and started in Baile Bhúirne, and finished in Belfast. The aim of Rith 2014 was to raise money to create a fund for the promotion of the Irish language in the community.

# MARCH

## 54th USI Congress

The 54th USI Congress took place from March 31st until April 3rd at the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Over 250 delegates took part. At this year's Congress delegates passed policies, debated motions and developed strategies for the year ahead. New policy across a whole range of campaigns was passed and some historic collaborations and commercial developments were announced.

The two key initial commercial projects launched at this year's Congress, were StudentShop.ie, a low-cost computer store as part of a joint venture with Green IT, and the introduction to the Irish market of the largest student discount scheme in the world, the NUS Extra Card.

A Five-Year Financial Plan for USI was put in place in consultation with Finance Committee following a mandate from last year's Congress, and was approved at Congress 2014. It includes projections for the income diversification strategy, changes in our system of budgeting, and also a commitment to the creation of a reserves policy/ sinking fund.

For the first time as Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairí Quinn addressed USI Congress 2014 on a wide range of Higher Education topics and an interesting Q and A session ensued following his address.

Announced at Congress 2014 was the historic USI-SIPTU Agreement– this formalises the relationship between the two Unions, providing for campaigning and collaboration on shared issues, and several membership benefits for students, particularly those in part-time employment. As part of this, a joint Standing Committee has now been established. As part of the USI- SIPTU Agreement, the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) were tasked with carrying out policy research to set out the inherent benefits to our economy and society of investment in Higher Education, and to make the case for education as a public good. Throughout the year, the President worked with Tom Healy, the Director of NERI, extensively on this project. It sets out a roadmap in line with economic recovery and increased investment in Higher Education towards a fully free, publicly-funded model. This paper was approved by Congress 2014, and is now USI policy.

The New Officer Board was elected at Congress 2014. USI Officer Board 2014/15 positions are as follows;

- USI President Laura Harmon
- USI VP Campaigns Glenn Fitzpatrick
- USI VP for Welfare Greg O' Donoghue
- USI VP Equality and Citizenship Annie Hoey
- USI VP BMW (Border, Midlands and Western Region) Conor Stitt
- USI VP Southern Region Martin Lynch
- Leas Uachtarán Gaeilge/USI VP for Irish Language Feidhlim Seoighe
- Nominations re-opened for USI VP Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance. At May National Council, Kevin Donoghue (current USI VP BMW Region) was elected as the incoming USI VP Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance.

The New Officer Board will take office on the 1st of July 2014.







# APRIL

## Rally for Equal Marriage

On the 28th of April the USI VP for Equality and Citizenship attended NUS-USI's rally for equal marriage outside Belfast City Hall on the eve before MLAs voted on the issue. Unfortunately, the vote was defeated with 51 voting NO and 43 voting Yes.

## Lá Dearg Beal Féiriste

Following on from Lá Mór na Gaeilge in Dublin, another march was organised to ensure language rights in Northern Ireland. Over 10,000 people took to the streets of Belfast City Centre in support of Language Rights being placed on a statutory footing.



## 66<sup>th</sup> ESU Board Meeting and ESU Cosmice

The 66<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting in Vienna was preceded by the Cosmice Seminar in Bratislava. Three members of Officer Board attended the Cosmice seminar and the 66th ESU Board meeting. We are proud to announce that our USI VP Academic Affairs & Quality Assurance, Cat O'Driscoll, elected to ESU Executive Committee. In addition to that the USI Resolutions on Zero Hour Contracts and Tax Avoidance were adopted. Furthermore an extensive look was taken at the Bologna Governance Paper which was developed in great detail by attending representatives and adopted. USI also worked in close proximity to other attending countries in the form of NARC (Non Aligned Random Countries) and we are delighted to report that our collaborations flourished.

## Student Summit 2014

The main aim of the Student Summit was to create a sense of community amongst young student entrepreneurs in Ireland. A place where they can come and learn about how to start their trade and take advice from successful people. USI collaborated with DIT Students' Union on the running of the USI Student Summit 2014. The event took place on April 8th in Dublin Castle at the Print-Works Conference Centre. The event was supported by Enterprise Ireland, Hays Recruitment, Carr Communications and LinkedIn. Speakers of the event included: Niall Harbison (Founder of Simply Zesty), Jane McDaid (Managing Director of Thinkhouse), Sharon McCooey (Director of LinkedIn Ireland) plus many



other successful and innovative businesses. There was a strong start-up focus at the Student Summit 2014 with a wide range of young start-ups coming to tell their stories. Some included Fone Sense, Popdeem, Buzzoo, OPSH and Hot House.





### **Student Achievement Awards Ireland (SAAI)**

The SAAI 2014 was held in George's Hall, Dublin Castle on April 17th to recognise the achievements of third-level students in Ireland and was hosted by Irish comedian Fred Cooke. SAAI 2014 promoted the remarkable contributions of students across campuses, their dedication to volunteering and campaigning, and recognised the creative skills of individual students.

President Michael D Higgins presented his Ethics Award and the award for Outstanding Contribution to Student Life. The SAAI's had a total of 25 Awards including the President's Ethics Award and a new category, the USI President's Award. The Award categories included student campaigns, activism, online/print media, volunteering and community engagement. For those working in student media outlets, the SAAI offers them the chance to be recognised by industry leaders. Education Editor of The Irish Independent Katherine Donnelly judged the Journalist of the Year and Features Editor of The Irish Times, Conor Goodman judged Publication of the Year. Youth website, SpunOut.ie judged the Community Awareness Award and Conor McCabe Photography judged Photographer of the Year. Community volunteering and campaigns to promote student well-being was also be recognised at SAAI 2014. Hugh O'Reilly (The Wheel) judged Charity Event of the Year and Volunteer Ireland judged the Volunteer of the Year category.

### **#4mentalhealth Campaign**

USI and Mental Health Reform teamed up to lead a campaign in advance of the local elections to ask voters to help make mental health a priority. 4MentalHealth was a 4 week campaign; with 4 key actions local candidates can take, if elected, to improve people's mental health and well-being. Voters contacted their local election candidates via email or tweeter and all information on the campaign was held on the mental health reforms website.



# MAY

## 'Promote The Vote' Campaign

USI partnered with the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and SpunOut.ie to launch 'Promote The Vote', a collaborative campaign focused on issues of significance to young people in the run-up to the Local and European Elections. An EU Parliament Candidate Hustings Event was organised in each of the three EP constituencies, in Galway for the Midlands-North West (NUIG, April 23<sup>rd</sup>), Cork for the South (UCC, April 30<sup>th</sup>), and Dublin (TCD, May 20<sup>th</sup>).

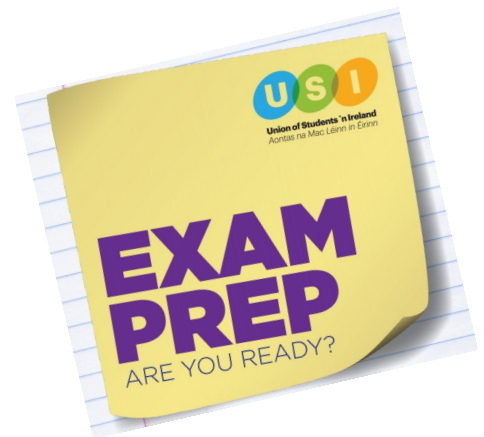


which attracted significant media coverage. SERD was used to communicate the responses of each candidate running for the European Parliament to a questionnaire asking them to outline their positions on various important youth issues, to students right across the country.

A SERD video and online campaign encouraging students to register to vote was a part of the campaign, as well as a number of photo stunts

## Exam Campaign

The Annual USI Exam Prep campaign was rolled out as exam time came around this Summer. USI has a dedicated webpage for exam preparations [www.usi.ie/exams](http://www.usi.ie/exams), it is a go to resource page for students studying and about to sit exams. The page has tips, advice and a downloadable study planner to help students during the exam period. As part of the campaign USI shared Exam Prep videos covering Exam Stress, Study buddies and Group Sessions on social media for the duration of the campaign.



## Value of Education

USI held a planning meeting for the USI Value of Education campaign in USI HQ on the 12th of December 2013. We subsequently passed policy on this campaign at National Council. USI developed a presentation, 'Higher Education: Public Good or Private Commodity?', which was delivered to all Parliamentary Parties in Dáil Eireann during the months of May and June. USI have engaged with key stakeholders, including a presentation to the Higher Education Authority board meeting, an online infographic and continue to build alliances with trade unions and teachers' unions.

## Headline Steering Group

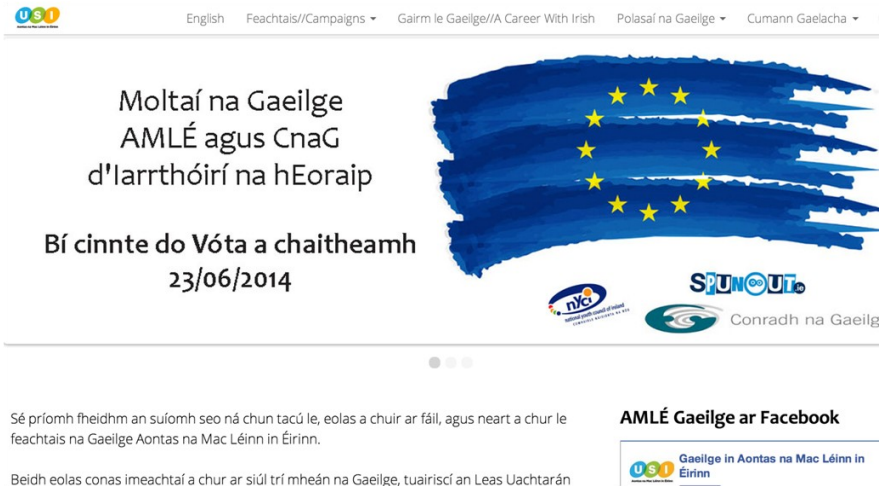
USI has secured a seat on Headline Steering Group ([www.headline.ie](http://www.headline.ie)). Headline has been set up by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention as part of Reach Out National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention. Headline is Ireland's national media monitoring programme, working to promote responsible and accurate coverage of mental health and suicide related issues within the Irish media. Headline aims to highlight mental health issues and address the stigma attached to emotional distress, suicidal behaviour and mental illness through the promotion of responsible media coverage.



## Launch of gaeilge.usi.ie

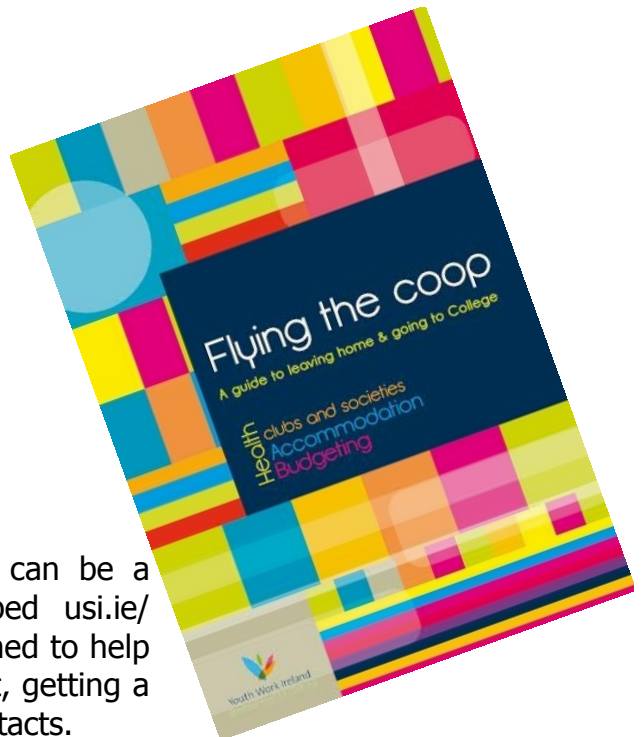
A new website, to support the Irish Language Campaign of USI, was launched in May. This website, was entirely designed in house, using open source and free web tools.

The Vice President Gaeilge will update this website with both Irish Language content based on the Work of the Organisation, and the Irish Language Campaign. The website also has the capacity to collect data and for students to register for a variety of events.



## Flying the Coop

USI supported Youth Work Ireland (Roscommon/Galway NE) to produce 'Flying the Coop' which is a booklet that provides Leaving Cert students with the information they need for moving out of home and going to college. This year USI assisted in redeveloping it and provided YWI with 'USI useful tips' in a number of the sections.



## Accommodation Advice

Moving out of student accommodation for the summer can be a stressful time for students. Due to this, USI developed [usi.ie/accommodationadvice/](http://usi.ie/accommodationadvice/). This section of the USI website aimed to help students and to give advice and information on moving out, getting a deposit back, property tax, signing contracts and useful contacts.

## Green Ribbon Support

USI supported See Change's Green Ribbon campaign at our May National Council and on social media. The campaign's focus was "Let's get Ireland talking about mental health".



# JUNE

## **Submission to NOSP**

The National Office for Suicide Prevention called for submission as part of the development of a new National Framework for Suicide Prevention for Ireland. USI compiled a submission consisting of a number of recommendations for the NOSP.

## **Lobby of the Oireachtas on Social Issues**

The Lobby of the Oireachtas on Social Issues took place on Wednesday, the 19th of June. Officers from around the country lobbied TDs and Senators on marriage equality, mental health, student accommodation, reproductive health, Transgender rights, employment equality, voter registration procedure reform and Irish language rights.

## **Irish Lobby of the Oireachtas**

On The 11th of June, representatives of USI and other interest groups met in Buswells Hotel with Teachtaí Dála, and Senators, to discuss issues surrounding the Irish Language. The main demands of the lobby was that the Official Languages Act is not weakened, that equality be provide for the Irish Language in the Budget, and the Derogation of the Irish Language in The European Parliament ends.

## **Dublin Pride**

USI will attend Dublin Pride 2014 Parade on June 28th. We will march proudly in the parade behind the USI Banner with member students.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT THIS YEAR,  
NÍ NEART CUR LE CHÉILE  
USI OFFICERBOARD 2013-14





# HIGHLIGHTS 2013-14

## Lough-In 2013

On 19-20th of August returning and newly elected SU officers descended upon Newcastle, Co. Down for NUS-USI Summer training event, Lough-In. Officers from Queen's University Belfast, University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College united to begin a comprehensive training programme to equip them for the year ahead.

The closing session of the event saw Toni Pearce (NUS President) and Joe O'Connor (USI President) along with Rebecca Hall (NUS-USI President) in discussion with our membership on how they can get involved in national campaigns during the year.



## Festival

NUS-USI's second FEStival event took place on 5-6 November with over fifty FE student officers gathered together at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Student officers from every FE college in Northern Ireland attended, as well as students from CAFRE. FEStival was jammed packed with sessions to enable officers to gain skills and knowledge in all aspects of their roles.

## Pound in your Pocket

NUS-USI addressed the issue of student finance by campaigning for the Pound in Your Pocket. Students face the issue of finance on a daily basis. The survey was launched in December 2013 and a total of 3245 valid responses were received. Following the launch of the preliminary findings at NUS-USI conference in April, Stephen Farry, Department for Employment and Learning Minister announced that there will be a full review into student finance in Northern Ireland.



## National Voter Registration Day

NUS-USI and Bite The Ballot took part in the biggest day of action to reverse the decline in the number of young people voting at elections. National Voter Registration Day was introduced on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, the anniversary of the 1832 Reform Act, when voter registration was first introduced. Universities and Colleges across Northern Ireland hosted a number of voter registration rallies and events. Almost 500 students registered to vote across Northern Ireland on this day.

## Apprenticeship Engagement in Northern Ireland

NUS-USI want to build a bigger movement that is inclusive to all learners. NUS-USI held several apprentice events at FE colleges around Northern Ireland in 2013-14. The main issues raised regarding apprenticeships were pay, careers advice qualifications, qualification recognition and access to apprenticeships. In April 2014 NUS-USI submitted a consultation response to DEL based on findings from the events which will help shape the future of Apprenticeships in NI. Furthermore at NUS-USI Conference in April delegates passed a landmark motion to create a National Society of Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.

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**SERD**



**The USI Student Summit**



**ESC 27 Brussels**



**More Talk, More Action**



**Promote the Vote**

**TOGETHER WE'RE STRONGER**

**NÍ NEART GO CUR LE CHÉILE**