



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

CONGRESS 2018

**AISLING
CUSACK**

**USI VP FOR
EQUALITY &
CITIZENSHIP**

INTRODUCTION

I'm the current Vice President for the Dublin Region with the Union of Students in Ireland, representing nearly 80,000 students across 8 different colleges. Before this, I represented the students of IT Tallaght as Deputy President for Education for two years.

Throughout my time in the student movement, I have always ensured students' concerns were listened to with senior boards and committees and worked on policy formation and procedures. I am also an experienced campaigner and have led successful campaigns in both my roles with IT Tallaght Students' Union and USI.



As a Vice President for the Dublin Region, I have demonstrated my ability to mobilise and connect with students on campuses - a key attribute required to ensure students are engaged in the work of equality campaigning and ensuring they have their say as citizens.

As both a local and a national officer, I have been at the forefront of campaigns on higher education funding, gender neutral bathrooms, improvements to transgender healthcare and direct provision, working with sabbatical officers and students alike to affect positive change for students. I understand the issues that need to be tackled across our campuses, and I have the skills and experience to ensure you have the best national support to achieve for your students.

We as a movement must continue to take to the pavements, and we must strive to eradicate the forms of marginalisation prevalent in our society, in our campuses and in our communities such as racism, classism, and ableism.

There are grassroots campaigns emerging in campuses throughout the country to combat inequalities and injustices. You are these grassroots campaigners and activists on your campuses, and you are everyday creating change inside your classroom, in your communities, and beyond. As your next Vice President for Equality and Citizenship, I will work with **you** in your strive for equality and amplify your **great work done locally to create change nationally**.

EXPERIENCE

Vice President for the Dublin Region, Union of Students in Ireland (2017-2018)
USI Students for Choice Taskforce Member (2016-2017)
Deputy President for Education, IT Tallaght Students' Union (2015-2017)
Academic Council member, IT Tallaght (2015-2017)
Bachelor of Business, IT Tallaght (2015)
Marks and Standards Committee member, IT Tallaght (2015-2017)
ITT Rainbow Society Treasurer (2013-2015)
ITT Ladies Soccer Team Chairperson (2012-2014)
Safe Space facilitator, Pink Training (2017)
Defence Forces (2010-2016)

ACHIEVEMENTS

Led successful USI affiliation campaigns (2017-2018)
Led successful repeal the 8th Amendment referenda on campuses (2017-2018)
Lead on USI #GetReg*d Campaign registering 18,000 students to vote (2017)
Led largest regional delegation to Education's march on October 4th (2017)
Nominated Student Leader of the Year, Student Achievement Awards (2017)
ITT Sports Scholar (2012-2014)
SafeTALK and ASIST certified
DRCC Handling Sexual Harassment in the Workplace certified

Equity of Access:

Equity of access is about identifying and removing barriers which prevent people from accessing education. With the National Access Plan 2015-2019 on its way to completion, it is imperative that **student success** is at the forefront. Higher Education needs to be a fully inclusive system that enables more people to succeed, irrespective of age, socio economic background, disability, ethnicity or other factors.

Students with disabilities:

Many students with disabilities choose not to disclose information regarding their disability, particularly mental health, to their institution or access the available supports on their campuses and many students can be unaware of the supports available to them.

- I will work with the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) to develop a supporting document for students deciding how and if they should disclose their disability to their institution.
- As an AHEAD Board Member next year, I will ensure that universal design learning and mainstreaming are on the agenda for institutions so that the entire education system can benefit.
- I will roll out disability support and awareness training for students' union officers.
- I will build on this year's Disability Conference and work with organisations to try and achieve funding to bring about wider participation, expanding the learning outcomes of such an event.
- I will continually lobby for students with disabilities attending college on a part-time basis to be eligible for the Fund for Students With Disabilities.

Mature Students:

Mature students compose over 10% of the student population. We as a national union, need to acknowledge the diversity of of this student group and start catering to their needs.

- Early communication of a high quality Mature Students Conference will increase attendance ensuring mature students get the opportunity to engage with USI, and learn necessary skills that will help them integrate into third-level institutions.
- I will develop an online forum for mature students to network.
- I will support students' unions development, assisting unions in the creation of Mature Students' Union Officer roles and work with those unions who already have those positions to improve student engagement with mature students on campuses.
- I will work with students' unions during their election processes for Council to ensure mature students are represented in their structures. This will positively impact the engagement between students' unions and mature students by allowing those students to be involved in directing the work of their unions and their union's democracy.

Students from Colleges of Further Education:

Many students can progress into higher education from colleges of further education and find themselves lost in college having missed the initial "welcome" stages and induction periods of first year.

- If elected, I will work with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and affiliated FE's to further understand how we can best support those progressing from FE into Higher Education.
- I will work with SOLAS and ensure FE students have all the information they need regarding access routes to higher education.

Part-time Students:

This year, the Department of Education and Skills never communicated with Access Officers that part-time students could have access to the SAF.

- I will ensure accurate information about the SAF is communicated to officers in a timely manner, along with best practise guidelines on how to disseminate this information to students.
- I will support students' union officers in their efforts to bring resources online so that evening students or part-time students can engage with those resources.

Members of the Travelling Community:

It has been a year since Traveller was recognised as an ethnic minority group in Ireland, but still no legislation has been brought in, leaving Travellers in limbo.

- I will engage with Pavee Point and lobby officials to put more funding into Pavee Point, with the aim to improve educational outcomes for the travelling community through access and support systems and get their Educational Programme back up and running.
- I will campaign with Pavee Point for legislation recognising the Traveller ethnicity.
- I will organise a USI annual celebration of the Travelling Community in March.

Recognised Prior Learning:

Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that widens access and allows potential students and current students demonstrate learning that they have already achieved. This can be through life experiences, work or prior study and education. RPL can allow students to gain admission to a course or gain credits or exemptions from a course they are already in.

- I would strive to get RPL on the agenda of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), with an immediate emphasis on access for migrants to combat the barriers faced by refugees.
- I will brief and develop a template for students' union officers, so they can negotiate with their institutions for improvements to their policies and maximise the visibility of these accreditations.

Direct Provision, Refugees and Migrants:

Last year only 2 asylum seekers qualified for support from the Government to attend third-level education. To be eligible, asylum seekers must fall within the same income thresholds as Irish applicants to SUSI, and have attended an Irish school for at least 5 years.

- I will work with students' unions and assist them in lobbying their own institutions to become universities and colleges of sanctuary, promoting the integration, inclusion and welfare of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.
- I will work with the Vice President for Campaigns to further develop our 'Together, Moving Forward' campaign, mobilising students to achieve positive relations with refugees on their campuses and combating hate speech both on their campuses and online.



Ethnic Minorities:

We need to encourage more ethnic minority student participation in our events and democracy as we cannot diversify our union without asking the very students who make us diverse how to do so.

- I will work with the African Students Association of Ireland (ASAI) and seek to strengthen our networks around the country and collaborate on campaigns.
- I will run a cultural awareness and sensitivities training for students' union officers.
- Work with European Network Against Racism to combat hate crime and the highlight the need for legislation around racist crimes in Ireland.

Consent and Relationship Associated Violence:

The USI Say Something Report was launched in 2013, showing that 1 in 5 women were on the receiving end of unwanted sexual conduct. Following that, TCD published survey results showing that 1 in 4 women had an unwanted sexual experience. Last year, a group of students from Queen's University, produced the S.C.O.R.E. Stand Together Survey.

- I want to work with the Vice President for Welfare, and source funding for another USI-led Say Something survey which can evaluate progress on our campuses, and delve into the perceptions of consent and sexual misconduct among students.
- I will link in with leading academics in this area such as SMART Consent in NUIG and Dr. Louise Crowley from the UCC School of Law, with the aim to further develop our USI Consent campaigns alongside our Vice President for Welfare, with added importance of safe bystander intervention.
- I will continue to partner with the Rape Crisis Centre and organisations such as Cosc to ensure students' union officers are trained on consent and are able to support and provide information for students affected by domestic or sexual violence.
- I will work with the Vice President for Campaigns to create an all-gender inclusive campaign highlighting the signs of dating and relationship abuse for students irrespective of gender or sexuality.



Gender Equality:

January saw the largest Women Lead event yet, this is an initiative that has a proven track record of success for self-identifying women who wish to be elected into leadership roles.

- I want to ensure the continued growth and scale of this event and carry out a 'gender equality audit' of each of the students' unions within USI. Data collection is important to support and inform the work of USI in this area.
- I will continue to raise issues with the HEA for postgraduate and doctoral students regarding maternity leave as they cannot take leave without it impacting their research.
- I will endeavour to diversify our speaker panels at Women Lead and Pink Training events, creating a broader space for more to engage with our union and overcome the barriers they may face. Let's diversify our activism!

LGBTQI*:

- Love Equality is the campaign for marriage equality in Northern Ireland of which NUS-USI is a coalition member. USI will work harder for our students in Northern Ireland and support NUS-USI with their campaign ensuring students in the Republic of Ireland are educated about the Love Equality campaign in Northern Ireland, so we can mobilise and support wholeheartedly.
- I will continue to build on the success of Pink Training while seeking to improve the event through headline sponsorships, community partnerships and bringing more diverse speakers, ensuring speakers and workshops reflect the needs of students.
- As the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy has just concluded, I will see this strategy into implementation and work on getting the funding we have been promised for Pink Training.
- I will work with student groups and lobby for increased access and the informed consent model for healthcare for the transgender community and raise awareness among medical professionals around Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

International Students:

We need to work harder for our International Students and campaign against the extortionate rising fees.

- I will bring back the International Students Forum and work with the Irish Council for International Students to hear their experiences and identify issues for policy and good practice.
- I will lobby the government for more affordable access to healthcare for international students.



Reproductive Rights:

I have experience of being involved in the campaign for free, safe and legal access to reproductive healthcare services in Ireland as a national officer.

- I will ensure the student voice is central to the debate after the referendum, continuing the discussion with our legislators.
- I will continue to campaign and lobby that the Oireachtas legislates for access to abortion services after the referendum in May 2018.
- I will be committed to supporting NUS-USI and Alliance for Choice in Northern Ireland in their campaign to expand abortion access to Northern Ireland.

Voter Reform and Registration:

As the national lead on #GetRegd voter registration campaign this year, I met with the Minister of State for Local Government and Voter Reform to discuss USI's position paper on voter registration reform, online voter registration, and reducing the voting age to 16.

- I will seek funding for voter registration campaigns which will educate and inform students whilst also getting them on the register for local and EU elections in 2019.
- I will organise a campaign to get students out to vote on the referendum on voting rights for Irish citizens abroad.
- I will support the Vice President for Campaigns in equipping students with the knowledge to make an informed vote through campaigns and organising candidate hustings if a General Election occurs in 2018 or 2019.

Environmental Sustainability:

We have launched the Students Achieving Valuable Energy Savings 2 (SAVES2) programme which is an EU funded programme encouraging students to save more energy in their student accommodation. I aim to continue USI's work in this field.

- I will support students' unions with their own sustainability and energy saving policies in reducing waste, plastic and saving energy.
- I will work on strengthening the knowledge, awareness and advocacy on social and environmental conditions in cotton and garment value chains and promoting Fairtrade on our campuses.

