

Re-Elect Oisín Hassan for Vice President Academic Affairs

Manifesto

Hi there! My name's Oisín Hassan, and at Congress 2017 I was honoured to be elected as your Vice President for Academic Affairs. I graduated in Law with Politics from Queen's University Belfast, before starting a Masters, and then served as Vice President Equality and Diversity in QUBSU. The following year I completed a term as Vice President Education at QUBSU.

Some of my proudest achievements in QUBSU included a successful campaign to end the MSM Blood Ban, developing a Diversity Ambassadors programme, forcing the University to abandon efforts to increase tuition fees, authoring a Report on Postgraduate Working Conditions that made the headlines, saving 7 staff jobs, reversing the closure of 2 courses, and preventing course entry requirements from rising. Perhaps my biggest piece of work was a complete overhaul of QUBSU's Course Rep structure, to include postgraduates and get all 770 positions on to an online election system. After developing a new Rep Academy training, I began to develop a Student Partnership Framework.

What have I done this year?

Getting student priorities on the agenda

- Successfully lobbied Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to develop Statutory Guidelines on Student Engagement in Quality Assurance in the coming year, ensuring Colleges must include you in all aspects of decision making.
- Developed a proposal to expand and increase the funding provided to the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) and for a sustainable governance structure.
- Developed a proposal for a National Student Charter or Partnership Agreement, alongside a National Framework for Supporting Students' Unions, the principles of which will protect SUs and ensure students are partners. This proposal has been accepted by the Minister for Higher Education.
- Ensured retention issues are central to the NFETL's future work
- Lobbied for reform at secondary education to be linked to college transition
- Lobbied the Department on the need for fee regulation for postgraduate and non-EU students

Created tools, policies and structures to support the student movement

- Began a national project on Class Rep and Student Volunteer Accreditation which is exploring successful practices like Digital Badging

- Created Policy Groups of Sabbatical Officers, exploring best practice in institutional regulations, assessment, and student complaints
- Worked with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning (NFETL) to create resources that can be used by Sabbatical Officers in policy development
- Launched a new education campaign and SU roadshow, focusing on exam success, drop-out issues, and on grants information.
- Supported local SUs in policy, campaigns development, and with casework such as SUSI
- Ensured stronger communication between USI and SUs on academic issues
- Began to compile a national report on placement supports and opportunities for students across HEIs
- Developed resources for Further Education College SUs to more quickly join USI, and developed links with FET agencies such as the ETBI and AONTAS.
- Developed a new Postgraduate Representation Network
- Coordinated the first Postgraduate students conference in many years, the Postgraduate Voice Symposium, beginning a much needed national conversation on postgrad issues

Meaningful student engagement and fostering important relationships

- Worked to support NStEP Project Teams in developing best practice approaches to supporting Class Reps and SU staff.
- Contributed to the work of Officerboard on policy issues including grant reform, publicly funded education, Technological Universities, international students, and Brexit.
- Proactive member of the European Students' Union Board, holding ESU to account and helping shape European policies for the benefit of our students.
- Supported student partnership efforts and Further Education Officer training in the North, building links between USI and NUS-USI.
- Established a connection and begun the process of USI becoming members of EURODOC (European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers)
- Secured USI nomination to National Advisory Forum for Doctoral Education

And what will I do if I'm re-elected?

National Student Partnership Agreement

This year discussions began with the Department for Education and Skills officials on the need to work towards a National Student Charter of Partnership Agreement. The Minister for Higher Education has now publicly referenced this as "interesting and progressive". If re-elected I want to make a National Student Partnership Agreement, negotiated between USI and the Department, a top priority.

Any agreement should be comprehensive, including sections on all aspects of college and student life, with key commitments to develop the role of students as decision makers. I want to

ensure that we include the role of Students' Unions, students on committees, student support services, the right of students to be involved in strategy setting in institutions, and protections and inclusion for specific student cohorts (including international and part-time). This list is by no means exhaustive. We're a national student movement, and we must be nationally ambitious.

A National Framework for Students' Union Autonomy

Students' Union Autonomy is integral to any work on the National Student Partnership agenda. The Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell-O'Connor, referenced the Scottish model for supporting SUs in Dáil Éireann, and noted that USI wished to begin this work. We must ensure this is championed and that Students' Unions are afforded their rightful role as the vehicle for student voice in our institutions. I will continue to support the USI President in this work.

Student Officer Training

Students' Union Training (SUT) requires a more integrated set of academic affairs and casework modules, that create a clearer picture of life as a Sabbatical. I also want to include more workshop style modules where Officers can explore practice in their Union and how best to implement change more quickly. This includes Class Rep reforms, making change on Committees, and changing College policy. And while I have made myself available throughout the year, I want training to make it clearer that the Vice President Academic Affairs is there for Officers support at any time.

Fighting the Marketisation of Education

As a student movement we need to call out policy developments that undermine and damage the ethos of third-level education as a public good. I will continue to fight for publicly funded Higher Education - but what good is it to simply fight for public funding, but not to protect our education from profit-driven senior managers? Setting big targets on student 'recruitment', both postgraduate and international, huge pressures on staff to generate research funding, and basing the allocation of services on income generation, are all perfect examples of how marketisation can creep in to our institutions.

We need to highlight marketisation and the negative effect it has on the provision of courses, on services in our institutions, on our staff, and on our students. I want to work closely with the next Vice President for Campaigns to create anti-marketisation toolkits, including briefings on how marketisation policies can develop in our institutions, and the effects that they have. This work can help to reinforce our message in the #EducationIs national campaign, but also help to identify the pressures that marketisation efforts are having on our education.

USI Policy Hub - Members Area

USI used to have a log-in Members Area for Sabbatical Officers. It's time we moved away from ad hoc Google Drives that don't get updated, or get lost. I believe that we can rebuild a Members Area on the website, and develop an Academic Policy unit within that. This space can house our already existing work on publicly funded education and grants, for example. However, it will also require significant policy development in areas that USI has yet to really substantially tackle in a determined and coherent way.

- **Part-time Students**

Supporting and representing part-time students needs developed thinking, and setting core standards for their education and experience. Students' Unions need clear resource for engaging part-time students and on how to ensure their institutions are creating an inclusive environment for them.

- **Remote Learners**

The increasing numbers of students learning through online, distance, flexible, and blended programmes, and interacting with their education through digital tools and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) means that the student movement must adapt.

- **Digitalisation**

USI needs to raise its voice more about the process of digitalisation, the opportunities and challenges it presents, and the need for significant investment in our institutions. Technology-enhanced education can improve teaching and learning, and we need to ensure the student movement is equipped to lobby on these matters.

- **Internationalisation**

With an International Education Strategy that sets out an agenda of internationalisation nationally, we need a student movement that understands these policies, and is equipped to lobby and advocate for student-centric change.

- **Research**

USI must set out a clear position on the role of research in our institutions, and the need to ensure that developments in this area complements the teaching sphere. Our institutions are setting targets that involve staff and other resource allocation in these efforts. Students' Unions must be more equipped to talk about research, policy development, income generation, and the role of staff and students in research efforts.

- **Teaching Quality**

There is a significant body of work being done by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, of which USI is a proud partner. We need to do more to utilise and highlight their work on enhancing teaching in Ireland. As a movement, we must ensure we encourage positive change in teaching.

USI Academic Policy Development

Ideally USI would have the amount of resource of other National Unions, so that it could have staff working across a vast range of policy areas. But, the reality is, we don't have the resource. I

want to champion an innovative joint project with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. This would focus on employing student interns in the Forum and in USI, to develop public policy, work with Students' Unions, and carry out student-centric research. The best way to tackle the range of issues facing students is to put students in the driving seat. They are the experts.

Academic Representation

I have begun to lobby the QQI for specific Statutory Guidelines on the engagement of students throughout quality assurance processes. This will be a priority for me in the coming year, ensuring institutions must be able to demonstrate how they have fostered the student voice. Key to this work is drawing upon the best practice of NStEP, in which I have ensured USI is a proactive partner.

I have worked with ISSE and with Student Officers this year to develop understanding around the use of ISSE data to make improvements, and how this data needs to be more available to Class Reps on Programme Boards. As a result, USI contributed a piece to the ISSE National Report 2017. Next year I want to ensure a more detailed piece is published as a separate publication, and is readily available to institutions and to Students' Unions.

International Affairs

USI are very active members of ESU, and are recognised as a leading National Union in Europe. However, our members aren't aware that they are also members of ESU. I want to do more to promote the benefit of ESU membership on the website, and through a new campaign across our social media platforms. I also want to ensure reporting from ESU conferences continues to be strengthened, with more input from National Council delegates.

Postgraduate Students

Annual Conference

Building on the Postgraduate Voice Symposium, USI should work toward formalising an annual conference for postgraduate student members, that can help to inform USI policy and mobilise our movement to fight on behalf of postgrads.

Postgrad Platform

This year I set up the Postgraduate Network, but now I want to use this Network to roll out a campaign highlighting the issues that postgraduate students encounter. Postgrad Platform would gather testimonials, written and video, on the barriers faced by postgrads, highlighting the complexities of different modes of study beyond undergrad. Platform would effectively become

USI's rolling postgraduate campaign, building a manifesto for change for postgraduate students.

Postgrads who work in our Colleges

Building on our links with IFUT and the TUI I want to work alongside the next VP Campaigns to ensure that postgraduate students who also work in our Colleges have access to Trade Unions, and that they are effectively represented in the workplace. Postgrad Platform can be utilised to launch a Survey on the work and pay conditions of our postgraduate members who also teach, demonstrate, and mark assessments. In my past roles in QUBSU I launched a similar Survey, the results of which I published alongside PhD students working within the Trade Union (the UCU) branch at QUB. The survey shamed the University. I want to bring this nationally.

Students in Further Education and Training (FET)

Membership

In the coming year I want to build on our growing links with the Further Education and Training sector, to ensure that we can grow our FE membership and support their needs nationally. I'm currently negotiating a possible proposal for funding with the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). This work will take time, and I will keep up efforts behind the scenes to see this through.

Training Development

I want to support the VP Campaigns to develop training for Officers and student representatives in FET. I have significant experience in training development, devised from a solid evidence-base, and with the view to shaping representatives equipped to improve education. To represent FE students, we need to support FE students to represent their peers.

Policy

With greater membership for USI, comes greater responsibility. It is imperative that we can reflect the needs of Further Education students in our work, and from increased engagement with FE Students' Unions, we should begin to collate and examine the difficulties they face on and off their campuses and how these can be reflected nationally. I want to prioritise finding the most effective method of communication with FET members. From ongoing dialogue we can build capacity as a student movement to tackle problems, to implement initiatives, and increase lobby efforts. Further Education and Training must be a more visible part of our Pre-Budget Submissions, General Election manifestos, and in our lobbying of the Department for Education and Skills.