

About

"The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is the sole representative body for students in Ireland and represents 374,000 students in over thirty-member colleges across Ireland, North and South. Throughout its history, USI has worked relentlessly in the pursuit of student rights in all areas of the student experience."

Objectives of USI

1. An education and training system open to all, irrespective of any consideration, including consideration of national origin, ethnic background, age, ability, sex, sexuality, creed, political beliefs or economic circumstances, so that each individual can realize their full potential.
2. An education and training system which truly serves the interest of the people of Ireland.
3. The right of students to a decent standard of living including the right to adequate financial support, proper housing and future prospects of employment in Ireland.
4. The defence and promotion of all democratic and human rights.
5. The provision of student services for the benefit of the membership on the principle that control of student service should lie with the membership.
6. To represent the interests of the students of Ireland at international level.

Overview

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students who undertake a placement or a work-based learning element to their programme of study. USI recognises that these opportunities for experiential, hands-on learning are an incredibly important aspect in the provision of a quality education for our students. However, there is often a lack of supports for students on placement, including academically, personally, and financially. These pressures undermine the quality of the experience and the contribution that the placement makes to the learning environment.

USI must undertake a number of core actions in order to ensure that it can adapt and respond to placement issues as they arise, but also, so that the Union is proactively leading on the need for reform across the board.

This Strategy sets out three key priority areas:

- Research on Placement and Work-Based Learning in Irish Higher Education
- Student Teachers
- Student Nurses

Collaborations & partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to ensuring effective evidence-based advocacy for students who undertake placements. Furthermore, USI recognises the need to work with others in a variety of sectors to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of student work placement.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions and external organisations.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.

While this Strategy aims to create flexibility so that USI can work proactively and respond to the needs of any student cohort involved in placements or work-based learning, USI recognises that Congress has mandated a number of priority areas.

Research on Placement and Work-Based Learning in Irish Higher Education

USI should undertake a wide-reaching piece of research on the use of placements, work-based learning, and industry-based programmes, working with Students' Unions and other relevant organisations.

This research should help to inform our Members Organisation and the advocacy they undertake for their students. It should examine a number of key areas:

- Develop a full picture of the number of students who undertake placements and other forms of work-based learning in Higher Education in Ireland, both North and South.
- Develop a full picture industry-based programmes as a specific aspect of this work.
- Report on the use of long-term and short-term placements.

The research should also examine and report on a number of key outputs:

- The development of placements and recommendations to strengthen the quality assurance and enhancement of such opportunities, including the involvement of student representatives and the student voice.
- The supports that students receive on placement, including but not limited too, payment and wages, site-visits, institutional Careers and Placement Offices, academic support, and access to services.
- The impact of placements on financial supports such as SUSI grants.
- The structure of work-based learning opportunities, and the specific nature and prevalence of these placements by discipline or subject.

Student Teachers

Work placement is invaluable preparation for student teachers who are pursuing their vocation as educators.

Students are following their dreams to teach the next generation while battling the high cost of living with no financial support being given. Along with working part-time jobs, students are on placements lasting 30 – 35 hours a week with no support for travel, food or materials.

The reality is, students can't cope with the cost of living without another job on top of this. The average cost of college is €12,500 while students, in Ireland are paying the second highest fees in the EU, after the UK. It's time our Government valued student teachers, otherwise we're faced with a drought of talent with the shortage of teachers reaching crisis point.

The Union of Students in Ireland is committed to working for student teachers, and working towards a fairer and better quality of learning for all.

Objectives

- To investigate the current situation for teaching placement students.
- To lobby for financial support for student teachers.
- To improve the teaching conditions student teacher face.

Actions

Phase 1

Phases one of the teaching placement strategy shall be collecting the data necessary to research the current situation for student teachers.

The purpose of the Student Teachers report is to;

- Provide survey evidence highlighting the financial challenges student teachers face when undertaking college placements;

- Explore the key concerns and barriers experienced by student teachers during placement;
- Identify ways in which placement procedures can be amended to ensure all students have the opportunity to undertake such studies, regardless of financial status;

The aim of the report is to;

- Develop collaborative solutions and recommendations regarding school placement to ensure greater access and equality to teaching qualifications for all students;
- Identify solutions which the Dept. of Education and individual Colleges can introduce to standardise their placement procedures to reduce any additional financial burden to students and their families caused by teaching placements;
- Engage with all educational institutions to alleviate any further financial burdens on student teachers.
- Contact relevant trade unions that represent Teachers, to partner on a teachers placement campaigns. These may include, but are not limited to, ICTU, TUI, ASTI and the INTO.
- Proper investment is needed in financially supporting student teachers while on work placements and get paid for fair work and to shift the burden of the Gaeltacht fee.

Phase Two

Once data has been collected, the strategy shall move on to phase two.

Survey report

- Collect a minimum of 2,000 respondents to the survey to ensure the research is represented figure.
- Analyse the data and comply all survey results into a survey report.
- Hold a press release with the partnering unions of the findings of the results.
- Deliver the report to the Department of Education.

Lobbying

- Create student teacher networks, through online platforms and through Students' Unions.

- From the survey report comply asks to add to the USI pre-budget submission.
- Lobby for the introduction of a stipend for student teachers on their work placement
- Lobby for the introduction of minimum wage for student teachers on their work placement.
- Lobby for more supports to be made available to student teachers on placement, such as counselling and college support.
- USI to lobby for the reinstatement of the state grant to cover all eight weeks of mandatory Gaeltacht placement for PME students.

Further Research

- Conduct further research to look into the mental health of student teachers following the survey report.
- Conduct further research to look into the drop-out rates and stress caused to student teachers on placement due to the high levels of preparation and working hours.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, partake in lobbying opportunities both nationally and locally and nationally with support from USI.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing placement policies in respective institutions.

Nurses

Student nurses on placement in Ireland should be entitled to a living wage. As per research conducted by USI, 93% of student nurses consider emigrating when they qualify as a Nurse.

Should this happen we will be left with a problem of epidemic proportions: no nurses or midwives left to work in our hospital wards.

The shortage of staff is already apparent on many wards and the added responsibility left on the shoulders of intern nurses and midwives as they try and learn the ropes.

As per the 2017 INMO Student Nurses Report states *"It is time that the HSE acknowledged the reality that nurse/ midwifery graduates are highly educated and sought after professionals globally. They also have ambitions of personal and professional development. If their current employer is not affording them opportunities to develop, then they will seek opportunities/ accept offers, elsewhere as seen in this survey, however many would stay if identified incentives were made available to them."*

The Union of Students in Ireland is committed to working for student nurses, and working towards a fairer and better quality of learning for all.

Objectives

- To get financial support for student nurses on placement
- To ensure there is adequate support for student nurses while out on placement.
- To work towards a structured placement for student nurses.
- Securing employment for student nurses once graduated.
- To ensure that disputes, negotiations and political lobbying is inclusive of the student perspective on the issue of pay and financial support.

Actions

- Collaborate with nursing unions such as INMO.
- Compile a report on the 2016 survey results conducted on student nurses.

- Ensure the Minister for Education follows through on promise to student nurses and midwives in Ireland are to be offered full time contracts upon graduation.
- Lobby the Minister for Education with the INMO for student nurses to receive the living wage of €11.50.
- Work with the INMO to ensure that student nurses on placement have better structured placement.
- Conduct research to compare the 2016 survey to, to see if improvements have been made.
- Lobby for additional support such as counselling to be made available for student nurses during their placement.
- Lobby for placement of student nurses to be located near the place of study.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, partake in lobbying opportunities both nationally and locally and nationally with support from USI.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing placement policies in respective institutions.

Appendix

Previous Mandates

USI Congress has previously passed a number of mandates that have been included in this Strategy.

Student Nurses

- The Vice President for Campaigns and USI Officer Board to strive to work with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) the relevant trade unions to mobilise students on a campaign on the issues of: pay, emigration, bullying and lateral violence.
- The Vice President for Campaigns and USI Officer Board to ensure that disputes, negotiations and political lobbying is inclusive of the student perspective on the issue of pay and financial support.
- The Vice President for Campaigns to work on implementing a comprehensive evidence based campaign and programme to erase the negative culture of bullying and harassment on placement by collaborating with the INMO, relevant trade unions, governmental departments, students' unions, hospitals and higher education institutions.

Student Teachers

- Officer Board to investigate the possibility of these students being provided with a level of support, subsidy or stipend for their placement work.
- The USI Vice President for Campaigns and USI Officer Board to work with the relevant trade unions, and other organisations, to assess the issues that may exist and to further mobilise students on a campaign on the issues of: pay, work, and recognition of the sector.
- The USI Vice President for Campaigns and USI Officer Board to ensure that disputes, negotiations and political lobbying is inclusive of the student perspective.

Generic Student Placement

- The Vice President, Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance to work with Member Organisations to accumulate current policies and practices relating to work placement programmes with a view to drafting a best practice policy that Member Organisations could use as a starting point for implementing a similar policy in their own Higher Education Institute.
- The President and relevant Vice Presidents to engage with relevant organisations and government departments to design and develop schemes, which are beneficial to workers and builds upon best practice in the Higher Education Sector.