

A portrait of Kevin McStrawrock, a young man with short brown hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a brown blazer over a dark shirt and a patterned scarf. The background is a scenic view of a body of water under a soft, golden sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is positive and professional.

VOTE

Kevin McStrawrock

Vice President for Academic Affairs

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

What do I have planned?



Higher Education Funding

The Irish Government refuse to make a decision on Higher Education funding, at the **expense of learners**. With Ireland on the cusp of becoming the EU state with the highest tuition fees, patience is wearing thin and **it's time for us to take action**.

I plan to work with Regional Officers and MOs to build a picture of how the current funding gap is affecting students locally, in turn **influencing the story we tell nationally**. Working with the VP Campaigns and their sub-committee, I'll advocate a community organizing model to build public momentum locally and build allies across the country.

Using my experience within the UK sector, I will **support members to battle the harmful effects of marketisation** locally. I will **work with NUS-USI members to rally against marketisation** and support the case for publicly funded higher education north and south of the border.



National Representation

I'll make the most of the VPAA's connections within the HE sectors **to push forward the priorities of our members**. From **pushing for a national Student Voice Framework that prioritises Students' Union recognition and autonomy**, to working with QQI to ensure students are at the forefront of driving quality enhancement; I'll continue the work of the current Vice President for Academic Affairs in **placing students at the centre of all national policy development**. I'll communicate the work I carry out on national bodies to members and OB colleagues on a regular basis.



Advocating Collaboration

I'll work with the Academic Affairs Working Group to **facilitate collaboration amongst MOs on policy development, class rep engagement and campaigns**. I'll **push for the redevelopment of a members section on the USI website** with an Academic Policy area where Education officers can upload and access examples of class rep handbooks, training slides and other useful resources.

I will create guidance notes and resources for members on the sorts of things MOs need support on from student involvement in governance, assessment and feedback, student complaints procedures, part-time learner engagement, teaching quality or anything else. I will **also continue to make space for local issues to be discussed in the working group**, as a way of driving collaboration and collectivism amongst members.



Student Involvement in Governance

I will work with the regional officers and the President to **review student participation in institutional governance structures** across all MOs and **support them to lobby their institutions to improve student participation in these structures**, using my connections in the HEA to highlight where gaps exist and push them to hold institutions accountable. I'll work **with QQI, NSTEP and the National Forum to develop additional resources** that guide institutions in incorporating students into all aspects of decision-making.

Mergers and TUs

The Technological Universities bill ushers in a new phase for Higher Education in Ireland. **Given my previous experience as President of a large multi-campus Students' Union**, I believe I'm well placed to support MOs in devising multi-campus SU structures. I'll keep my ear to the ground with the newly formed TUDSU to support them in their first year and work with Regional officers, and MOs to support TU preparation – **providing resources and advice on an ongoing basis**.

Campaigns

Work with the Vice President for Campaigns and their sub-committee on the campaign for publicly funded education, **and work with the Vice President for Welfare to deliver a collective exam stress campaign that combines the education and welfare portfolios nationally** – and support MOs in doing the same on their campuses.

Training and Union Development

Responding to MO feedback, I'll work collaboratively with OB and NUS-USI to **review training needs and ensure our training prepares each officer to be the best they can be**. I'll advocate for an officer handbook – including briefing notes on training sessions which allow officers to refresh and consolidate their learning beyond the training period. I'll endeavour to support ongoing union development throughout the year through working groups and 1-2-1 check ins.

I'll push for **more scenario based training that truly prepares officers for what is expected of them** – and incorporate training on non-traditional student needs from postgraduate to international students and more.

International Affairs

The aftermath of Brexit leaves a cloud of uncertainty over the higher education system, both north and south. As VPAA, I will work with regional officers and NUS-USI to support MOs in **offering support to NI students studying in the Republic of Ireland, and EU and ROI students studying in the North**. I'll push for the rights of EU (including ROI) and NI students to be recognized by both governments.

I'll ensure USI uses its' networks through ESU to identify opportunities for cross-European collaboration and will ensure this support is extended to members in the North.

Students' Union Autonomy

The current Vice President for Academic Affairs has already set the foundations for a Students' Union Autonomy framework and the Minister for Higher Education has expressed an interest in the idea. I'll **work with the President to continue lobbying efforts to deliver this, and I will work with the NUS-USI President to support efforts North of the border**.

Work-Based Learners

The student movement has made strides in supporting the experience of vocational students this year – from the work of the Pharmacy Students' Campaign, to the concessions delivered on behalf of student teachers. It's important that this momentum doesn't wane. I'll **work with MOs and trade union partners to amplify the voices of our future nurses, teachers, pharmacists and more**.

Further Education Engagement

I'll **continue to work on the delivery and implementation of the FET Strategy** to develop student representation and relationships within FE colleges. I'll **work with NUS-USI to create and strengthen USI's links with FE members in the North and to develop resources that are relevant to them**. I'll also work with the Regional Officers, and with FE bodies such as SOLAS, ETBI and Aontas to grow USI's membership based in FET and support other FETs in the creation of effective Students' Unions.

Learning from the example of NUS-USI, **I'll drive forward USI's role in working to support the experience of apprentices**, collaborating on this with SIPTU and other trade union bodies.

Representing Postgraduates

I'll work with the Vice President for Postgraduate Affairs to **review the outcomes of the Postgraduate Experience survey and deliver upon the wishes of our postgraduate members**. I'll **work on the creation of resources that support members to develop postgraduate representation** in their institutions. I'll build links with trade union bodies in Universities and Colleges to **improve the working conditions of postgraduates who teach**.

Next Steps for NSTEP

NSTEP has been at the fore of driving forward student engagement practices nationally over the past few years. I'll work with members to **evaluate progress so far and influence NSTEP's next phase – also working to involve more members, including those in the North**.

I've driven the introduction of a staff-student partnership agreement within my own institution and I aim to **support and encourage partnership practices and student involvement in decision-making** across the island.

Support with SUSI

I'll continue to collaborate with the VP Welfare to **maintain contact between MOs and SUSI and will support officers to support their students**.

Irish Language

I'll work with the Leas-Uachtarán don Ghaeilge and MOs to support the interests of Irish Language speakers – from **continuing lobby efforts against the Gaeltacht fee to supporting local Irish Language officers to improve their educational experience**.



Who am I?

I'm **Kevin McStravock**, for the past **three years** I've had the pleasure of serving the students of Ulster University, firstly as **Vice President for the Coleraine campus** – and **for the last two years, as the Overall President**. During this time, I have also been a student trustee and a **part-time officer for NUS-USI** – offering me an opportunity to represent the voice of the 200,000 students across Northern Ireland. My experience in the movement thus far has only just whet my appetite – and now I come to you, asking for your support in electing me as the next USI Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

The decision to run for this role came after a lot of thought and conversations with student officers across the country. I would like to serve you as someone who can **shape the direction of higher education nationally** – whilst also **supporting education officers across the island in improving things at a local level**. I have a passion for union development, for representing the interests of a diverse range of learners, and for all things quality enhancement and partnership and I want to bring this passion to the fore as a national officer.

From Letterkenny to Limerick, Derry to Dublin, I'll work collaboratively and collectively to enhance the student learning experience locally and nationally. Have a read of what I aim to focus on below, and feel free to shoot me a message if you want a chat about anything!

What have I done:

- Served as a full-time officer for three years, two as President. Represented 24,000 students across a geographical spread and from a range of backgrounds and modes of study.

- Introduced a Staff-Student Partnership Agreement within my institution – and worked with Senior Management to emphasize student partnership and engagement within the University Learning & Teaching Strategy.

- Secured around £900,000 of additional institutional funding for UUSU over a three year period to help us deliver upon our Strategic Plan.

- Reviewed UUSU's Student Voice structure – introduced Faculty Reps, moved elections for our 800+ academic reps online and worked with the University to establish staff champions for the Student Voice within each School and Department.

- Student representative on Ulster University's Brexit Readiness committee leading on advice and guidance offered to UU students in relation to Brexit.

- Ensured postgraduate students are represented on the University's academic board – helping to strengthen links with our 5000+ postgraduate students. Successfully lowered PhD extension fees and improved pay for postgraduate teaching assistants.

- Restructured UUSU's Student Council to establish dedicated representation for non-traditional students – including disabled students, student parents & carers and ethnic minority students.

- Worked with my institution to involve students in curriculum design and widen student involvement in institutional revalidation processes.

- Lobbied my University to introduce Asylum Seeker scholarships and secured additional funding to support these students with the cost of their studies. Currently working alongside QUBSU to make our institutions Universities of Sanctuary.

External Experience

- Served as an NUS-USI officer and NI representative on the National Executive Committee for NUS UK.

- Member of the Student Strategic Advisory Committee for QAA, representing the voice of NI students on a range of strategic items relating to higher education quality in the UK.

- Student representative on the QAA's Academic Integrity working group which is considering UK-wide steps to be taken in combatting contract cheating.