

# MEGAN REILLY

FOR USI VICE PRESIDENT FOR  
EQUALITY AND CITIZENSHIP

*Congress  
2019*



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

# INTRODUCTION

Hi!

I'm the current President of NUI Galway Students' Union, and before that I was a full time Welfare Officer, a part time Equality officer, and a part time Academic Convenor, so I've been involved for a while. It didn't take me long to realise that where my passion really lay was with equality issues. I've mostly dedicated my time in the movement towards learning as much as I can about, and advocating for access to higher education for minority groups, with a particular focus on how minority groups are supported to progress during their third level experience.

I have always been passionate about expanding representation for minority groups. During this campaign I have consulted as widely and broadly as possible, in order to take in the voices of those whose experiences shape the role.

The role of Vice President for Equality and Citizenship is incredibly vast and has enormous potential. Enshrined in the USI constitution is that USI regards the defense and promotion of all democratic and human rights as a core goal of the organisation. Students have always been at the forefront of social justice campaigns, and rightly so. We are the voices of the future, the ones with the power to shape the society we live in through our work on a local and national level. I am immensely proud of our involvement in Marriage Equality and Repeal, and we now need to carry this energy and power forward. Equality issues are an inherent part of USI's fight for access to Higher Education, and more than that, we need to recognise that our students exist outside the classroom, and that their rights need to be fought for and protected at all levels of society.

I have thought a great deal about why I want to go for this role, and I believe that all my years in the student movement has built up in me the capacity, experience and drive that has led me to this point. It was events like Pink Training and Women Lead that got me into the Student Movement, and I have so much to give back to it. Significant barriers to education still exist for many minority groups, and the National Representative Union should continue to be a force for change, on our campuses and in society as a whole.

Le Bród,  
Megan  
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## BROAD IDEAS FOR THE ROLE

- Bringing an intersectional approach: often minority identities intersect and we must recognise the lived experiences of those with multiple intersecting identities and ensure campaigns and lobbying efforts reflect this.
- Use our incredible network of Part Time officers across the country who are elected and working on equality issues on their campuses every year. Establish a strong network of these officers that facilitates continuous dialogue and allows them to feed into the Equality and Citizenship working group at National Council.
- Continuing to show solidarity with the North on liberation issues; particularly Abortion Access and Equal Marriage, and educating students in the south on the issues.
- Campaigning for Hate Speech Legislation to be introduced, to protect minority groups against online attacks, discrimination in housing, transport, and in many aspects of their lives.
- Supporting grassroots activism on our campuses.
- Ensuring all USI run campaigns are inclusive towards minorities.
- Expand the Equality and Citizenship sections on the website to publicise the work USI is doing in this respect.

## DIRECT PROVISION

This is arguably Ireland's next big social justice issue, that is moving out from a hardened core of activists out into the public sphere. Day after day our students seeking asylum are faced with the threat of deportation orders, while they continue to live in a system that is unjust and inhumane.

If elected I will:

- Roll out a National Students Against Direct Provision campaign.
- Lobby the Department of Justice and Equality to take into account education status when it comes to deportation orders and respecting and Institute of Sanctuary status.
- Assist Students' Unions in the work they are doing towards making their institutions places of sanctuary.
- Devise a national anti-deportation strategy for Students' Unions.
- Lobby the Department of Education and Skills to extend Domestic fee status to students in Direct Provision.

## ETHNIC MINORITIES

If elected I will:

- Work towards better integration across our campuses by providing officers with the tools to run campaigns on social integration.
- Run a Diversity in Leadership event, with the aim to breaking down barriers that exist for ethnic minorities in running for election.

- Lobby for the 27th amendment to be changed through legislation, so children born in Ireland have a right to Irish citizenship.
- Focus in on information gathering around specific discriminations faced by students of colour, for example in seeking accommodation.

## DISABILITY RIGHTS

If elected I will:

- Have USI develop an accessibility audit template for campuses with the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD), for Students Union's to roll out on campus and use as a lobbying tool to strive towards campuses that are more accessible to all students.
- Continue the work done at a national and local level towards the implementation of Universal Design for Learning.
- Create more of a network for students with disabilities, beyond the annual conference for students with disabilities. This would involve using disability rights activists to build an online group.

## CONSENT

There has been lots of work done nationally this year, but it is set to become a publicity exercise with no discernable impact across campuses. This is still a major issue across the third level sector.

If elected I will:

- Continue to work with the Vice President for Welfare to lobby nationally for consent workshops to be funded by the HEA.
- Ensure a national lobbying effort around robust reporting and support structures across institutions.
- Have USI rerun the 'Say Something' survey on sexual violence which was first launched in 2014.

## LGBT+ STUDENTS

Much work has been done in this area in recent years, yet there is still a ways to go towards true equality.

If elected I will:

- Provide support to LGBT+ Societies during the year on their campaigns and events, and encourage resource sharing happens between societies.
- Continue the lobbying efforts done so far by the 'This is me' Trans healthcare movement towards an Informed consent model for Trans Healthcare
- Look towards national implementation of a Gender Identity and Expression policy from the CAO, instead of different policies being introduced in every institution.

## MATURE STUDENTS

Mature Students often have a unique experience, and we need to advocate for mature student specific supports.

If elected I will:

- Expand the work of the Mature students gathering by creating an online network of Mature students, through societies and part time officers.
- Work with Mature Student officers across the country to ensure USI is up to date with issues facing mature students, and assist any Students' Union who wish to introduce a Mature Students' Officer.
- Expand the partnership between USI and Mature Students Ireland, to see what more the National Union could be doing to support mature students on our campuses.

## GENDER EQUALITY

- Ensure intersectional, diverse approach to speakers at all USI events, particularly Women Lead and Pink Training, taking in a range of different backgrounds and experiences.
- On reproductive rights: investigate the access students have to getting the abortion pill if they have on campus health units or doctors.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- Continue the work done to date with the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) to ensure the international student voice is heard.
- Lobby the Department of Justice and Equality to reform the process for visas for international students; the process as it stands is incredibly restrictive. Furthermore collaborate with the VP Postgrad affairs on lobbying for an easier Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) process at local level, as it is costly and lengthy.



## EQUITY OF ACCESS

If elected I will:

- Part time students and Access students: In many institutions, these students are excluded from accessing certain services, and at a national level can be excluded from funding opportunities. Though progress has been made in this area with the Student Assistance fund, I will continue to ensure part time and access students locally and nationally have access to supports they need.
- Mapping out support for Students from the Travelling community, and ensuring a national celebration of Traveller ethnicity day in March.
- Raise issues around parental leave for Postgrad students, and resourcing Students' Unions around supports for student parents, eg. Student parents policy, breastfeeding spaces and creches on campus.

## SUSTAINABILITY

This has proven itself to be a really important issue for student and trojan work has been done by Students' Union officers across the country, and we saw the role the Student Movement have played in Climate Case Ireland.

If elected I will:

- Assist and support Students' Unions in devising and implementing their own sustainability strategies.



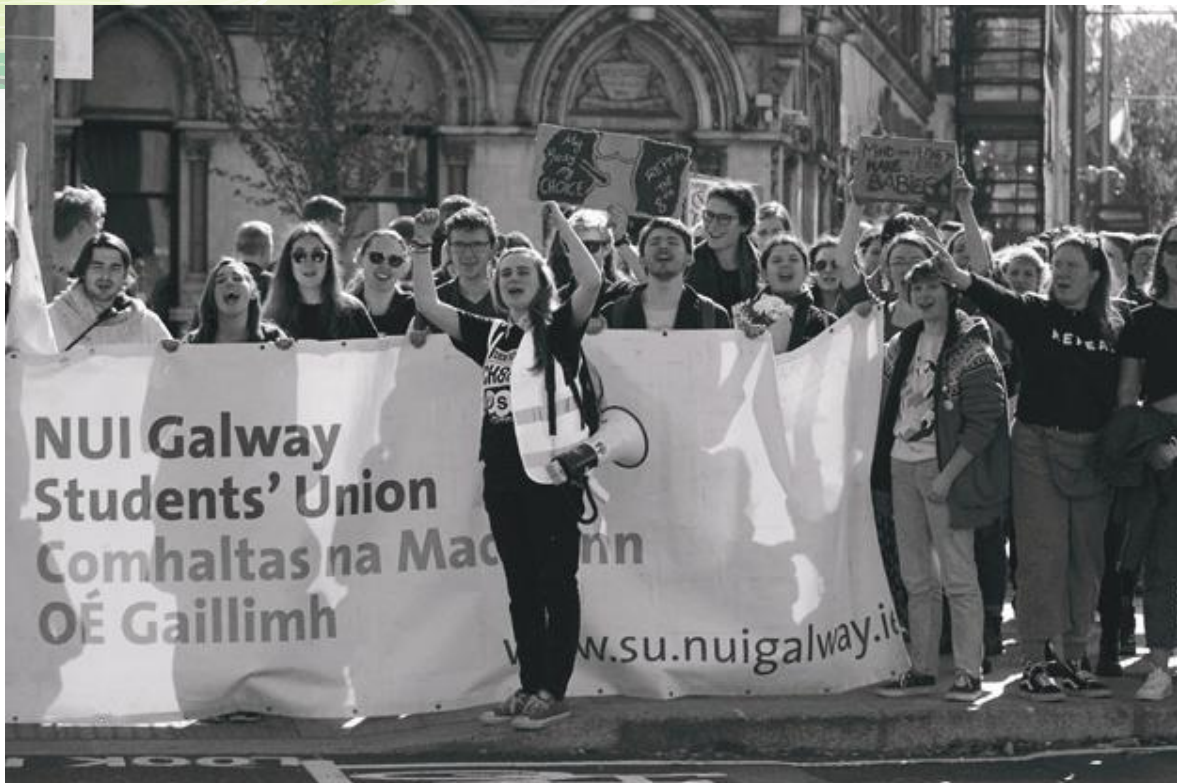
-Work with USI staff, in particular the Saves2 Coordinator, to encourage SU's to get sustainability on the agenda in their institutions.

## CITIZENSHIP ISSUES

This is a large remit of the role which doesn't always get as much attention, however, it provides a really great opportunity at to encourage active citizenship on our campuses, as microcosms of society.

If elected I will:

- Expand the Get Reg'd and Seanad Shakeup campaigns, while advocating at a national level for USI's Policy on Voter registration reform.
- Develop resources to help Students' Unions engage with TDs, Senators, and other local politicians, and assist them in local and regional lobbying on student issues.
- Seanad reform: the system as it stands is elitist and leads to disengagement from most of the Irish public. Alongside the President I would continue to lobby for the introduction of the recommendations in the Manning report.



## SOME OF THE THINGS I'VE ACHIEVED

### BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

- Led the reform of NUI Galway Students' Union Executive committee to change Welfare Officer to Welfare and Equality officer as well as creating the roles of Gender and LGBT+ rights officer, International Students Officer, Disability rights officer, and Ethnic minorities officer.
- Secured Gender Neutral bathrooms in NUI Galway

-Led both the NUIGSU 'Students for Marriage Equality' and 'Students for Choice' Taskforces.

-Led a voter registration campaign in NUI Galway that saw over 3,000 students registered to vote in one academic year.

-Previous member of USI Students for Choice Taskforce.

-Speaker at the first National Deaf Talks conference 2019.

-Host college and lead on campus coordinator for Pink Training two years in a row.

-Nominated for Student Achievement award for Equality Activist of the Year, 2017.

-Started the process to introduce Smart Consent workshops into NUI Galway.

## EXTERNALLY

-Volunteer with Teach Solais LGBT+ resource centre

-Previous volunteer with the National LGBT+ Helpline

-Member of Galway Pride committee, 2016.

-Board member of the Irish Family planning association (IFPA).





CONTACT ME!

MREILLY3294@GMAIL.COM  
0863855502

