

The National Council of the Union of Students in Ireland

Minutes

National Council USI, NC 59.4

USI HQ Office, 14 Upper Mount Street

24th October, 2018

Chairperson: Richard Hammond

Deputy Chairperson: Cathy Pembroke

NAMES APPEARING ON THE ATTENDANCE LIST:

(No liability and/or reproach accepted for difficulties deciphering manuscript notations)

CCSU

Ryan Shannon

CITSU

Aaron Buckley

DCUSU

Craig McHugh

DITSU

Pierre Yimbog

DKITSU

Maria Maguire

GMITSU

Aaron Burke

IADTSU

Grace Latham

ITBSU

Kris Sulkowski

ITCSU

Erica Cunningham

ITSSU

Tara Ní Raghallaigh

ITTSU

Jessica Murphy

LITSU

Ashling McGrory

MSU

Katie Deegan

NCADSU

Ross Kelly

NUIGSU

Megan Reilly

STACSU

Marie Lyons

TCDSU

Shane DeRis

James Cunningham

Paraic McLean

David Flood

Aimee Connolly

Oisín Vince Coulter

WITSU

Marie Sheedy

Bord na nOifigeach, AMLÉ

Síona Cahill, President

Oisín Hassan, Deputy President/ Vice President for Academic Affairs

Damien McClean, Vice President for Welfare

Michelle Byrne, Vice President for Campaigns

Aisling Cusack, Vice President for Equality and Citizenship

Barry Clohessy, Vice President for the Border, Midlands and Western Region

Lorna Fitzpatrick, Vice President for the Southern Region

Colm O'Halloran, Vice President for the Dublin Region

Aoife Deasy, Vice President for the Irish Language/Leas Uachtarán don Ghaeilge

Olivia Potter-Hughes, NUS-USI President

Preliminary Notes

- The President introduced USI newly appointed Public Relations Executive, Aoife Duff.
- At the end of the meeting the NUS/USI President wanted to a discussion with the group regarding an upcoming referendum campaign.
- The President noted the sad news regarding the sudden passing of former USI President Joe O'Connor father RIP. The President continued by highlighting that, Joe O'Conner was also a former GMIT sabbatical officer and Chairperson of the Coalition for Publicly Funded Education. The President proposed a minute silence at the meeting as a mark of respect to the O'Connor family.
- The meeting was asked to confirm if journalists could be in attendance. The meeting decided not to allow the attendance of any journalists.

Emergency National Council

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the format of today's Emergency National Council. The Chairperson read out the statement of purpose why today's meeting was requested;

Pursuant to Schedule C.9.3 of the USI Constitution, I request that an emergency meeting of the USI National Council be convened as soon as practicable.

The purpose for which the emergency meeting is to be convened is to review the Pre-Budget 2019 strategy and tactics deployed by USI, together with discussing and agreeing an appropriate response to Budget 2019, including but limited to media engagement, lobbying, local and/or Dublin-based mass protests/demonstrations, direct action, a student strike, or such other steps as may be agreed upon at the emergency meeting.

The Chairperson then suggested that the meeting is broken up into the following three parts which was **agreed without objection**.

1. Review the Pre-Budget 2019 strategy and tactics deployed by USI
2. Discuss tactic in response to Budget 2019
3. Agree on an appropriate response to Budget 2019

1. Review the Pre-Budget 2019 strategy and tactics deployed by USI

TCDSU highlighted that they felt USI lobbying tactics have made no impact and haven't been effective enough. TCDSU continued by noting that the plan didn't catch any attention and isn't working so, therefore, needs to be adjusted. TCDSU added that it was regrettable that education was not at the heart and soul of this year's campaign. TCDSU noted that maybe it is not possible to manage both important campaigns at the same time.

ITTSU explained that they were, from the start against the proposal of making accommodation a core issue as they believed they would struggle to get the necessary support as it's not a major issue for students in their area. ITTSU stressed that any concerns or issues regarding the campaign should have been flagged earlier.

ITBSU clarified that the decision to make accommodation the core focus was decided at crossover National Council.

DITSU addressed concerns regarding how productive the summer Lobby of Oireachtas day was and also questioned if the lobby day is producing the right amount of return for students since no core objectives were addressed in the budget. DITSU also added that the main focus was on the accommodation protest which took resources away from preparing for the budget submission. DITSU suggested that a review of the Lobby of Oireachtas be organised in order to ensure that TD's are not attending for lip service reasons only.

GMITSU added that they felt the protest overall was not bad but noted that student issues were lost behind the messages coming from the coalition even though it was the student movement who had the highest number of members present on the day.

DCUSU stressed that USI core focus needs to be fighting for education.

DKITSU noted that marching down O'Connell Street should be reviewed as it placed students at the back of the march.

TCDSU highlighted that USI should be able to organise more than just one campaign and the real question is, if this campaign was done effectively enough. TCDSU also added that USI needs to be getting student issues highlighted and talked about more.

WITSU added that the campaign for the last three years has been focused around one big march. WITSU suggested that maybe the impact of marches is limited and therefore this needs to be reviewed as it's hard to continually get buy-in from students. WITSU also added that changing the topic did grab attention from students. LITSU agreed with this point regarding securing buy-in from students.

DCUSU discussed the need to be more active during the summer months and focus now needs to be directed towards the confidence and supply negotiations. DCUSU also suggested the importance of having ongoing follow-up after the Lobby of Oireachtas day to ensure continued pressure on TD's.

GMITSU highlighted that from now on it is important that every MO supports any campaign going forward as only six MO's got involved in the "Rainy Day" campaign. GMITSU stressed the importance of moving the campaign forward by developing localised campaigns that target local TD's.

TCDSU suggested the idea for USI and SU's to examine previous lobbying tactics that were used and assess what could be adopted going forward.

DITSU highlighted some of the struggles that MO's faced in terms of getting students involved in the campaign so early on in the first semester and questioned the level of return that the protest delivered for students. DITSU suggested that USI develop a stronger focus in terms of re-examining its core campaigns.

The President added that the whole of USI Officerboard considers the feedback regarding the recent campaign tactics very seriously. The President suggested that a review of what has been done on this issue for the last decade would be a positive step. The President continued by stressing that during the summer months ongoing meetings were arranged to discuss education issues and concerns.

The President commended the excellent work that local MO's put into the recent accommodation protest and noted the strong media presence that students received on the day. In reference to the "Rainy Day" action on Budget day, the President explained that this was done to highlight the negative impact that the Budget had on the third level sector. The President continued to note that the next step is to develop tactics around the confidence and supply negotiations and to focus USI prioritise going forward.

2. Discuss tactic in response to Budget 2019

TCDSU stated that USI should not wait to react before a lead up to a general election campaign and instead suggested that immediate action is organised. DCUSU added that the focus needs to be directed towards lobbying the confidence and supply negotiations and that it was important to get buy-in from all MO's. DCUSU also added that part of the plan should be about targeting local Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil TD's and conduct small protests outside both parties headquarters. GMITSU stressed the importance of using local media and agreed that all MO's need to get involved.

The VPC outlined a number of points relating to the recent Campaigns Committee meeting which reviewed the recent accommodation campaign. The VPC confirmed that there will be more information presented at the next National Council.

TCDSU added that in order for student issues to be taken seriously by the government, the student movement needs to become an effective lobbying group that empowers its members to get involved and act within the campaign. TCDSU suggested arranging a national student strike with the support of other trade unions as this would help highlight student issues and get education back onto the agenda. TCDSU also stressed that some form of action needs to be arranged immediately with a strong focus to gain maximum attention.

NUIGSU explained the importance of energising students to get involved and it was important to try and evaluate how activism is happening on campuses. DCUSU added that a student strike would be a good idea but the basis of the campaign needed to start off at a local level and then progress up to a national level. IADTSU suggested that MO's could invite local TDs to their Class Rep Councils.

3. Agree on an appropriate response to Budget 2019

TCDSU suggested that USI should consider putting candidates forward for election in strategic areas in order to highlight student issues.

ITTSU noted that USI should develop a strategic plan for campaigns.

MSU noted a concern if a strike was to be proposed how this would affect students with mandatory attendance. Both DCUSU and TCDSU noted the importance of getting support from other trade unions in order to ensure that mandatory classes won't be an issue. NUS/USI President suggested an examination of how previous strikes were delivered and to assess how this was received by students at the time. The NUS/USI President added that there shouldn't be assumptions that people will be in favour of strike action.

GMITSU recommended that the campaign, for now, should be focused at a local level in order not to burden students during the busy workload period.

TCDSU suggested that USI develop a campaign toolkit. TCDSU also added that it was important to give students the opportunity to get involved and shape the campaign.

The President proposed the following action points;

1. USI to create a confidence and supply agreement manifesto.
2. USI to develop a campaign that targets the upcoming confidence and supply negotiation talks through organised protests.
3. USI to discuss with the Coalition of Publicly Funded Education about obtaining support for further action.
4. The President is to invite the Minister for Education and Skills to attend the next National Council (Friday the 16th of November) in IT Tralee. There will also be a detailed Working Group discussion to debate the campaign in further detail at this NC.
5. USI with the support from Students' Unions will prepare and release a joint statement on this issue.

6. USI Officerboard will support MO's to help mobilise students and develop a strong activist culture by setting up local action groups.
7. USI and MO's to devise a strategy that starts targeting local elected representatives from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.
8. USI will develop a campaign that will focus on increasing the support from the general public with regards supporting publicly funded education.
9. Campaigns Working Group will be open to representatives from each MO with immediate effect. Each MO President will nominate one person to participate in the Campaigns Working Group activities.

These action points were seconded by GMITSU and was **passed without objection.**

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and participation at this constructive National Council meeting. The Chairperson wished everyone a safe journey home before closing the meeting.