USI Drugs Harm Reduction Strategy 2016-2019



# About USI

 "The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is the sole representative body for students in Ireland and represents 354,000 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 the Union of Students in Ireland1. 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 if Ireland at international level.

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### USI Drugs Harm Reduction Strategy

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of well-being and prevention and reduction of drugs related harm, to be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and affiliated Students’ Unions.

Education at second and third-level is crucial in terms of informing students about drugs and the consequences taking drugs may have on their future.

According to the National Student Drugs Survey 82% of students have tried illegal drugs.

USI will endorse health promoting norms and increase awareness of the potential harmful or negative effects of drug consumption.

The USI Vice President for Welfare must follow the USI Drugs Harm Reduction Strategy and assist local officers in following through with its recommendations by disseminating the strategy at the beginning of each year.

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# Collaborations and Partnerships

# *USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to organisations working to reduce drugs related harm. USI recognises the need to work with others in the sector to further our aims and ambitions.*Objectives:

# To build support for the work that USI does in the area of drugs harm reduction.

# To develop new initiatives through collaborations with students’ unions and external organisations.

# To establish a point of contact within the HSE and Drugs Task Force to support unions to further campaigns and policies.

# To liaise with activist groups such as SSDP to expand campaigns and resources.

# 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.

# Support unions in establishing local links to support their work in the area of drugs harm reduction.

**Suggested Action For Students’ Unions:**

* To aim, where possible, to establish links with local organisations and resources and promote local supports to students in campus community.
* To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote supports, resources and preventions.
* Establish a link with local SSDP branches to expand upon campaigns and resources.

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# Training and Supports - Students’ Unions*USI encourages students’ unions to run campaigns and/or distribute information to students on drugs and associated risks so that students can make informed decisions in relation to drugs and take necessary precautions.*

# Objectives:

* To equip officers in their work on drugs harm reduction.
* To equip officers to support students at risk of becoming problem substance users.

**Action:**

* Provide a training module for relevant officers during the summer term on drugs awareness, drugs first aid and substance abuse.
* Support officers in establishing links with local, community based support services to identify referral paths for students.

Training shall only be undertaken by an agency, organisation or individual accredited to deliver such.

**Suggested Action for Students’ Unions:**

* Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
* Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
* Aim to establish local links with community based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
* Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to health promotion.
* Aim to develop and review new or existing campus health policies.

# Prevention

*USI aims to promote a social, academic, and residential environment that supports health-promoting norms. A key part of prevention and harm reduction is in equipping and arming students with the information they need to protect themselves. USI aims to provide a relatively easy way to distribute advice by engaging students and sign-post to further information services, for example Drugs.ie etc.*

**Objectives:**

* To raise awareness amongst the student population on drug harm prevention and to encourage Students’ Unions to run local campaigns on the issue.
* To encourage students to actively seek information on the risks associated with drug use and sign-post students to information resources.

**Action:**

* Continue to work with national bodies to source accurate information that is relevant to the student body.
* Co-ordinate a national campaign to promote awareness of the risks associated with drug use and promote help seeking.
* Support unions in promoting and developing resources to inform their students of the risks associated with drug use.
* Support and promote drugs awareness campaigns and initiatives such as “What’s In The Pill”.
* Support unions in rolling out training modules for drug harm reduction for student leaders.

**Suggested Action for Students’ Unions:**

* Source accurate information that is relevant to the student body in relation to drugs.
* Promote resources to inform students of the risks associated with drug use and support relevant national campaigns and initiatives that aim to do the same.
* Facilitate, with support from USI, training modules for drug harm reduction for student leaders.

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# Screening, Treatment and Support Services

*The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of student well-being. The promotion of these services is equally important to inform students of their availability and encourage them to seek help.*

**Objectives:**

* Improve access to good quality support services for students.
* To liaise with external organisations such as ISHA and IAUCC to identify and promote appropriate screening initiatives to support students in difficulty.

**Action:**

* Liaise with the HSE and Drugs Task Forces to Map and identify support services in campus catchment areas.
* Support unions in identifying a referral path for students affected by addictions and at risk of developing an addiction.
* Promote the use of an online brief intervention tool such as Drugs Meter, etc.
* Provide training for relevant officers in SOAR through collaboration with the HSE.
* Liaise with unions and external organisations such as ISHA, IAUCC and CSSI to identify and promote screening initiatives to support students in difficulty.
* Support unions in initiating the development or review of a college-wide drugs policy where one is not already in place.
* Support unions in introducing a “No Judgement” policy for support services.
* Lobby for the next Government to invest in treatment and health facilities along with educational programmes to inform young people about drug use and associated risks**.**

**Suggested Action for Students’ Unions:**

* Where possible, partake in lobbying opportunities both nationally and locally for the increase of investment in treatment and health facilities, along with educational programmes.
* Initiate the development or review of a college-wide drugs policy.
* Initiate the development or review of a college-wide drugs policy.
* Promote the use of an online brief intervention tool such as Drugs Meter etc.
* Promote campus supports to ensure students seek help when needed.

# Research, Monitoring and Evaluation*It is vital for USI to review progress under the Drugs Harm Reduction Strategy on an annual basis. By providing basic annual progress reports on the action points outlined in the strategy, progress and effect can be tracked and with the provision of annual reviews, updates or changes can be suggested if deemed necessary.* **Objectives:**

* To monitor the impact of USI campaigns to reduce drugs related harm.
* To evaluate and review each campaign yearly and to update the strategy accordingly.
* To continue to collaborate and partner with organisations to collect research and data to guide USI’s work in drug harm reduction.

**Actions:**

* Map progress of the strategy and produce a yearly progress update document.
* To review all campaigns and evaluate impact with support from external expert groups and consultation with VP Campaigns.
* To further develop partnership with the National Student Drug Survey.
* Implement the strategy with regular monitoring and review of its effectiveness by USI National Council, Welfare Working Group, Campaign Working Group and Regional Working Groups.

**Suggested Action For Students’ Unions:**

* Where possible, review local campaigns on campus level to ensure messaging is effective, appropriate and relevant to students.

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 **Previous Mandates:**

* To create a Substance abuse strategy document that would contain information in relation to drug awareness, campaigns, how to combat addictions and other items deemed essential to be included by welfare working group. Appropriate training should be provided for Welfare Officers over the summer period so they can handle cases in this area. This motion shall apply till December 2012.

**Reporting and Progress:**
To ensure transparency, accountability and ongoing priority is placed on the health and wellness of students in Ireland clear and consistent communication on the progress of the implementation of the USI Drugs Harm Reduction Strategy and its initiatives is vital. The strategy’s progress will be documented in USI’s annual report, along with highlighting individual campus initiatives as they are launched throughout the year.

The strategic objectives for Drugs Harm Reduction in 3rd level between now and July 2019 are set out in this strategy and reflect the ambition and intent of the Union of Students in Ireland to deliver on its mandate for its members.

*In preparation, a range of significant / strategic risks facing the strategy’s implementation were identified.*

* Budgetary and insufficient or inadequate budgets to meet campaign delivery costs.
* USI having to discontinue work and downsize campaigns/Officer resources
* Failure to achieve collaborations on the action points set in the strategy. For the strategy to be effective USI will need to foster support from external organisations and establish links with institutions and external stakeholders.
* Failure to ensure that the strategic and operational policies of the USI are properly developed and implemented, and that targets are met.

**Risk Mitigation:**

The Union of Students in Ireland will, over the life of this Strategic Plan, evaluate the above risks and will ensure that all actions and initiatives undertaken manage these challenges pro-actively, with actions being identified and implemented without delay, so that our mandate can be pursued and effectively delivered for our members.