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#STUDENTS4CHOICE

STUDENTS FOR CHOICE STRATEGY

ADOPTED AT CONGRESS 2016.
THIS STRATEGY IS BEING UPDATED BY THE
STUDENTS FOR CHOICE TASKFORCE 2017 AND WILL
BE RE-ISSUED IN SEPTEMBER 2017 AT NATIONAL COUNCIL.



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

Students for Choice - Repeal The 8th

Section 1: Background

The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland introduced a constitutional ban on abortion. It was effected by the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1983, which was approved by referendum on 7 September 1983 and signed into law on the 7 October of the same year.

USI has a long history of campaigning for access to abortion services here in Ireland. USI's involvement in this debate in the past (SPUC vs. Grogan) led to the change of legislation so that information about abortion could be distributed freely in the state. USI continues to have a clear stance to campaign for access to free, safe and legal abortion services when a woman's life is at risk, including from suicide or if a foetus has a fatal abnormality and cannot survive. USI also has a clear mandate to campaign for the repeal of the 8th amendment of the Irish Constitution, allowing for legislation to be made to allow for accessible abortion rights for women in Ireland.

For many students' unions the issue of abortion is viewed as an issue of equality and women's rights. Access to safe and legal abortions in Ireland is critical to advancing gender equality and the position of women in Irish society.

The current legislation, which forces women to travel abroad so as to access abortion services, makes abortion a class issue, and inherently inaccessible to students. "The UK Department of Health releases statistics each year on the number of women and girls who present addresses from the Republic of Ireland at abortion clinics in England and Wales." These statistics show that approximately one quarter of women who give Irish addresses are aged between the ages of 18-25.¹ Irish women are also more likely to receive surgical abortions. Surgical abortions are more invasive than medical abortions, which are available up to 9 weeks. The reason for this is lack of information and also the time it takes to organise travel to another country.

¹ <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Statistics>

Young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are discriminated against because of their inability to afford the significant costs of travelling abroad for an abortion. It costs at least €1,000 to travel for an abortion, including clinic costs, travel and accommodation. Young women and students do not normally have ready access to such funds. The current legislation also makes it possible for women to be sentenced to jail for a period of up to 14 years or be fined an enormous amounts of money if they induce an abortion in Ireland.

The failure to provide services in Ireland creates considerable psychological, physical and financial hardship for those who are either forced to travel outside the country for abortion or forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term because of restrictions imposed upon them

Mandate

The Union of Students in Ireland has a unanimous mandate from USI Congress 2009 to campaign for free, safe and legal access to abortions in this country.

‘Congress notes:

That USI is mandated to lobby the government and other relevant bodies to develop greater access to abortion services for all women within the state
(06/WEL 6 Abortion)

Congress further notes;

That USI’s involvement in this debate in the past (SPUC vs. Grogan) led to the changing of legislation so that information about abortion could be distributed freely in the state.

Congress recognises:

that in many Students’ Unions abroad and indeed in many organisations worldwide, the issue of abortion is viewed as an issue of equality and women’s rights.

Congress further recognises:

That the issue is one of concern for Welfare Officers around the country.

Congress is disappointed:

by the silence of USI on this issue for the past number of years.

Congress Acknowledges:

The establishment of the Safe and Legal (in Ireland) Abortion Rights Campaign which aims to end the hypocrisy of exiling women in crisis pregnancy that choose to have an abortion. The campaign includes various strands, including a litigation strand, a public awareness strand and a national and international advocacy strand.

Congress Mandates:

The Welfare and Equality Officers to work with the Safe and Legal (in Ireland) Abortion Rights Campaign to once again make this issue a priority for Irish Women.

Congress further mandates:

The Welfare and Equality Officers to raise awareness of the Safe and Legal (in Ireland) Abortion Rights Campaign to USI members and to support the campaign in any of its actions.

Some Key Facts:

- In March 2016, QUBSU Union Council voted to support the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 in Northern Ireland.
- In February 2016, DITSU Class Rep Council voted in favour of the SU taking a pro-choice stance.
- Following a referendum in February 2016, DCU students voted in favour of the SU taking a pro-choice stance.
- 84% UCC students voted in favour of the SU leading a campaign to repeal the eighth amendment in November 2015.

Purpose

The purpose of the 'Students For Choice - Repeal The 8th Strategy' strategy is to effectively mobilise the student population to campaign on this issue and to vote in the referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment.

Objectives

1. Empower and mobilise students to campaign for a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment.
2. Ensure that student leaders, students and supporters are equipped with the necessary skills and information to engage effectively with the campaign.
3. To support Member Organisations in developing their own strategy to Repeal the 8th Amendment
4. Build alliances with key groups and community organisations both north and south of the border.
5. Generate extensive media and social media coverage of the campaign.
6. Repeal the 8th Amendment to Bunreacht na hÉireann.
7. Lobby to secure a place/seat on any Constitutional convention or any national decision-making body on this issue.

Section 2: Initiation of the Strategy

- a) Implement the strategy with regular monitoring and evaluation of the campaign and its effectiveness by USI National Council, Equality and Citizenship Working Group, Campaigns Working Group and Regional Working Groups.
- b) Establish a USI Task Force on Students for Choice, composition of which to be approved by USI National Council no later than September 1st.
- c) Ensure that Students for choice is a rolling item at every Equality and Citizenship Working Group in the lead up to the referendum.

Deliverables

1. Organise training for Officers and Students on this issue
 - a) Students' Union Training

Incorporate a training module for sabbatical officers on the Students for Choice campaign and how to register students to vote at Students' Union Training every year.
 - b) National Networking and Planning Day

USI will organise a national networking and planning day for students in semester 1 in the academic year to plan how students can work together to campaign on this issue nationally.
 - c) USI Activist Academy

USI to incorporate content on campaigning for Students for Choice into a national Activist Academy training event in semester 1 of each academic year.
 - d) Training Module

Devise a training module which can be delivered to each member organisation.

2. Register and mobilise students to vote in the referendum when it's called.
 - a) Update the USI Voter Registration strategy in order to apply it to the Students for Choice referendum. The new strategy should be voted upon by USI National Council before September each year.
 - b) Lobby for the referendum to be held as early as possible and lobby for student friendly voting days (Friday or Saturday voting).
 - c) Organise transport or discounted transport for students to polling stations on voting day.
 - d) Organise a national 'Students for Choice' campaign.

3. Ensure that student leaders, students and supporters are equipped with the necessary skills and information to engage effectively with the campaign
 - a) Ensure that student leaders in member organisations are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully implement the campaign strategy on a local and national level through provision of training on the

campaign and on voter registration at USI National Council and at class representative councils.

- b) Provide a copy of the strategy to every sabbatical officer in USI member organisations and a digital copy to every class representative in USI member organisations.
- c) Work with multimedia and film students to develop a series of videos on the topic and design students for branding of the campaign.
- d) Develop effective communication channels between the Union of Students in Ireland and students.

4. Build alliances with key groups, such as, but not limited to:

Abortion Rights Campaign

Action for Choice

AIMS; Akidwa

Amnesty Ireland

Anti-Austerity Alliance

AntiRacism Network

Atheist Ireland; Choice Ireland

Cork Women's Right to Choose

Doctors for Choice

Galway Pro-Choice

Irish Council for Civil Liberties

ICTU Youth

Lawyers for Choice

Mandate

National Women's Council of Ireland

Northern Ireland Alliance for Choice

Parents for Choice

Rape Crisis Network Ireland

Re(al) Reproductive Health

ROSA

TCDSU Repeal the 8th Campaign

TENI; TFMR Ireland

Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment

The Workers Party

UNITE the Union

Etc.

- a) Identify key groups/demographics/organisations that USI should build a relationship with over the period ahead and develop an engagement plan for each group.
 - b) Establish links with pro-choice societies and set up Students for Choice - Repeal The 8th campaigning groups linked to each students' union.
 - c) Meet with representatives of each group to discuss our respective strategies over the period ahead.
 - d) Agree a memorandum of understanding with each organisation on how we can work together to promote the campaign.
 - e) Regularly meet with these groups to discuss progress on our collective goals.
 - f) Undertake a risk management on all relationships to ensure that they are in keeping with the objectives and mandates of USI.
 - g) Organise community engagement events in local communities to generate awareness and support of our campaign.
 - h) The USI President to highlight this issue as part of trilateral meetings with the Presidents of NUS-USI and NUS UK and explore how the three organisations can work together.
5. Coordinate national campaigns and events
- a) Organise 'My Body, My Rights' video campaign in line with the Amnesty International campaign.
 - b) Organise a myth busting/information campaign highlighting the reality of the impact the 8th Amendment has had on people in Ireland by the end of the 1st semester each year.
 - c) Ensure a USI presence at the Annual March for Choice.
6. Generate Extensive Media and Social Media Coverage for the Campaign
- a) Organise national and regional launches for the campaign.
 - b) Engage national and local media with the campaign by organising photo-calls, distributing press releases and making use of personal stories.

- c) Target opinion –leaders like celebrities, sports players, supportive politicians, media personalities.
- d) Use clear hashtags for Twitter and update social media regularly.
- e) Make use of Facebook cover photos, Twibbons, Snapchat Filters/Geotags and profile pictures.
- f) Use class addresses to generate awareness on campus.
- g) *Create a Thunderclap encouraging people to vote.
- h) Explore the possibility of rebranding the USI website and vote.usi.ie ahead of the referendum.
- i) Organise regional debates on campuses.
- j) *Organise an ‘8 Days, 8 Reasons’ Campaign as a counting to the polling day.
- k) Engage with and request to be included in any televised or radio debates around this issue.

*contingent upon a referendum being called to repeal the 8th amendment.

Section 3: Risks and Risk Prevention

What are the risks associated with the campaign?

1. Risk Identification

a) Participation of Member Organisations

This strategy requires significant commitment from member organisations to successfully implement it. It will require member organisations to lead the campaign in individual regions, thus, feeding into the success of the campaign. If this commitment is not forthcoming the campaign will suffer from disparities in impact which will negatively affect the campaign nationally.

b) Other Campaigns

Other campaigns, local or national, may divert attention from the ‘Students for Students for Choice’ campaign. It is inevitable and very much necessary that other campaigns co-exist with this campaign. However, this may present challenges if the campaign is consistently placed on hold to run co-existing campaigns at a local and/or national level.

c) Low student voter turn-out

A low student vote in the referendum could reduce the credibility of the campaign and of USI. A low voter turn-out could also demotivate student leaders and students themselves when it comes to the power they have to effect change

d) Engaging with pro-choice organisations or pro-choice societies

Failure from USI or MOs to engage with pro-choice societies across the country or with pro-choice organisations could mean that the campaign has little input from those people it directly affects and will decrease buy-in. Failure to engage with other pro-choice organisations could mean that there will be duplication in campaigns that USI runs and those that other organisations are running.

e) Disclosure Training

So that SU officers are able to respectfully engage with their members and that they are able to engage with those who are opposed to the campaign appropriately.

f) Student Case Studies

Ensure that students who engage with the campaign in a public manner are informed where any videos/statements etc. are going.

2. Risk Prevention

a) Participation of Member Organisations

Regional Vice-Presidents of USI should build channels of clear and frank communication with officers in member organisations that allow for continuous feedback on implementation of this strategy at a local and national level.

Campaigns Working Group, Equality and Citizenship Working Group and Regional Councils at USI National Council should be used as a 'collective accountability' tool to keep member organisations abreast of the latest

developments on other campuses, collating best practice and overcoming challenges.

USI should assist member organisation who wish to hold their own referenda on this issue or have policies passed by their own students' councils.

b) Other Campaigns

The Students for Choice campaign should be a standing item on the agenda of the Equality and Citizenship Working Group, all Class Rep Councils and Executive Meetings of Member Organisations in order to ensure that, while other campaigns may require significant attention throughout the year, this campaign remains a constant discussion point at local and national level. There is a lot of potential to integrate the Students for Choice campaign with other USI campaigns and training events such as Class Representative Training, Part-time Officer Training, Activist Academy and the voter registration campaign etc.

c) Low Voter Turn-out

- i. Transportation discounts should be sought by USI and Students' Unions for students who are travelling home to vote.
- ii. Student friendly voting days should be lobbied for (e.g. Fridays).
- iii. Students should be updated regularly via social media about upcoming election/referenda.
- iv. Effective stunts, photo-calls and videos should be organised to encourage voting and active citizenship.

d) Engaging with pro-choice organisations or pro-choice Societies

- i. Contact details for pro-choice societies and relevant pro-choice organisations should be compiled and sent to all MOs
- ii. USI to promote the national networking and training day well in advance so that both MOs and pro-choice societies can attend.
- iii. USI to create memoranda of understanding with MOs as to how to communicate throughout the campaign with pro-choice societies

Risk Monitoring

USI Officer Board will hold a monthly risk evaluation, management and monitoring meeting to discuss the aforementioned risks as well as other risks that may arise throughout the year.

Section 4: Who will work on the strategy?

Roles and Responsibilities:

National Council	Sanction Actions & Evaluate Progress
USI Vice-President for Equality and Citizenship	Oversees progress of strategy; chairs Equality and Citizenship Working Group; Task Force on Volunteering and Citizenship; Task Force on Students for Choice; plays a large role in organising modules for Students' Union Training and Activist Academy. Engages regularly with pro-choice societies and will coordinate the national networking and training day in Semester 1. Organises the USI delegation at the Annual March For Choice. Will work with the VP Campaigns and the President to seek sponsorship for the campaign where necessary.
USI President	Oversees progress of the strategy; assigns tasks to Officer Board; chief spokesperson for the organisation; member of Volunteering and Citizenship Task Force and Students for Choice Taskforce. The President will engage with NUS-USI and NUS via tri-lateral meetings about potential collaborations for the campaign. The President will

	approve expenditures for the campaign and assist with sponsorship proposals.
USI Vice-President for Campaigns	Oversees the day-to-day running of the campaign, works closely with the VP Equality and Citizenship and assists them with any campaign launches/demonstrations, member of Volunteering and Citizenship Task Force and Students for Choice Task Force. The VP Campaigns will work to implement the USI Voter Registration strategy
Regional Vice-Presidents	Members of both Task Forces, rolls out the Students for Choice campaign in their regions, engages with pro-choice societies on campuses in their regions, promotes USI activities in MOs in their region, rolls out the USI Voter Registration Strategy in their region.
Students' Union Officers	Engages with pro-choice societies and/or SU pro-choice Rights Officers, local communities and promotes the campaign on campus. SU Officers will participate in working groups at National Council to sanction actions and evaluate progress of the campaign.
USI Campaigns Working Group	Oversees progress of the campaign and provides a space for collective accountability and National Council.
USI Equality and Citizenship Working Group	Oversees progress of the campaign and generates ideas.

Task Force on Students for Choice	Oversees progress of the campaign, conducts research and generates ideas.
Task Force on Volunteering and Citizenship	Will update the USI Voter Registration Strategy and bring it for approval to USI National Council before September 1st each year and will oversee its implementation.
Pro-choice societies	Will work with USI and MOs to implement the USI Students for Choice and Voter Registration Strategy. Will promote campaigns on campus and online.

Acknowledgements:

The Union of Students in Ireland would like to thank the Students' Unions and pro-choice societies who gave input and feedback for this strategy.