

Candidate for Vice President for Campaigns

Michelle Byrne - Working Manifesto 2018

Students, officers, we have a fight on our hands! The fight for higher education funding, the fight for accommodation & regulation and the fight for our voices to be heard. I'm Michelle Byrne and I have a vision for a decent higher education experience for all of our members. Campaigning is at the heart of our movement; informing and activating our members and moving us towards solutions.

As the **current Vice President of the Southern Region** in the Union of Students in Ireland, campaigns are at the heart of my work. The regional role is about getting down on the ground, rolling out the ideas of the Vice President for Campaigns and the policy officers. This close working relationship has given me the insight and following that, the inspiration, to run for the position. Campaigns is something I have always had a passion for, whether it was through my skills in design, digital marketing, creative brainstorming, planning or simply being on the ground campaigning to students!

Advocacy, for me, does not stop at the door on the way home from work. It is part of my personal life too. This passion and dedication will help drive campaigns next year from the ground up. I am no stranger to lobbying and taking action on a local SU level - from preventing a library closure by threatening to barricade ourselves into the library with books, to lobbying TDs, holding a demonstration at a governing body and a plan and threat of an all out student strike during my years in WIT Students' Union.

This year has been jam-packed with campaigns, from #GetReg*d, to the #EducationIs National Campaign, the Teachers' Campaign, 'Students For Choice' and everything in between. Working alongside the current VP for Campaigns Officer on not only the Campaigns aspect of the role but on Union Development work, Training modules and Ents and Marketing has given me an inside look of the other aspects of the role, of which I have immensely enjoyed preparing for MOs.

I believe campaigns are the backbone of achieving our larger goals as a student movement and I want to be at the helm of it. But we need to get back to the grassroots movement, we need to create grassroots lobby groups to influence the very crooks of our campaigns.

This online manifesto is a working document ahead of Congress. I want to hear your ideas; your suggestions. Please feel free to engage with this manifesto and contact me.

Questions? Suggestions? - michellebyrnedesign@yahoo.com | 0861303100

Experience

- ESU 'Women's Participation in the Movement' Taskforce member
- USI International policy support
- Co-ordinator of USI Entertainments Committee & policy
- USI Vice President of the Southern Region
- USI Finance Committee member
- WIT Students' Union President
- USI Campaigns Sub-committee for two terms
- Nominated for Best Education Campaign for Upskill Week at the SAAI
- WIT Students' Union Deputy for Education
- Studied Digital Marketing in WIT
- Studied Design (Visual Communications) in WIT

National Campaigns | An Feachtas Náisiúnta

'The National Campaign' is the biggest campaign for the year and should be treated as a yearlong campaign. A demonstration may be necessary but it might be only the start, middle or end of the campaign. There should be many more actions taken throughout the year from other local actions, lobbying County Councils and TDs, submissions, online petitions, polls, media work and so much more. Working closely with the Campaigns Subcommittee should not be underestimated when creating a well-rounded National Campaign that stays at the forefront of our agenda. Regional officers are core to this work and should continue to spearhead this on the ground.

The decision on Higher Education Funding is well overdue and the Government are stalling on making a decision. With the biggest political lobby day USI has seen, County Councils publicly supporting Publicly Funded Education, the setting up of the Coalition for Publicly Funded Education and a massive demonstration behind us so far this year, we cannot take the pressure off the government to make a decision.

Voter Registration | Clárúchán na Vótálaithe - Active citizenship is vital in order for the student movement to have an effective lobbying voice. Voter registration is essential to this and I want to equip SUs to register students to vote through capturing incoming students at the beginning of the academic year and then continually throughout the year.

An informed vote is a better vote. With many referenda (extending voting rights, divorce, reducing voting age, blasphemy laws, women's role in the home & more), presidential elections, local elections, European elections on the horizon and most likely a general election, I want to ensure students are informed when voting through running information campaigns, hustings/debates and looking at partnering with initiatives such as SmartVote.ie.

Elections | Na toghcháin – Alongside encouraging students to vote in off-campus elections, we must continue this trend at campus level. I want to continue the success of #WomenLead and look at how we can encourage more people from diverse backgrounds to run.

Support should be available to those who are interested in running by providing local election trainings and I want to look at the feasibility of providing a pack for SUs to run an election training themselves, should they want to. We also need to encourage people to engage with USI elections with a 'USI Run For Election' campaign and ensure the wide promotion of the candidates running.

Irish Campaigns | Feachtais Ghaelacha - *Le teacht an Leas-Uachtarán don Ghaeilge Lán-aimseartha, tá súil agam go mbeidh mé in ann oibriú leo chun feachtais Ghaelacha níos mó a chur ar siúl, mar shampla, Seachtain na Gaeilge.* With an incoming full-time Irish officer, I hope to work alongside them for bigger and better Irish Language Campaigns such as Seachtain Na Gaeilge.

Not forgetting the inclusion of Northern Ireland in these campaigns. Following from the Irish Educational Survey, we will need to use that data to create the basis of a campaign going forward.

I also want to ensure a cohesive roll out of the use of the Irish Language in all campaigns.

Workers Rights - Cearta na n-oibrithe Amongst the promotion of workers' rights, The 'Big Start Campaign' for Early Childhood students is work we should continue on with SIPTU to ensure our graduates are getting proper pay for their work and ensuring childcare is affordable for our student parents.

Welfare Campaigns | Feachtais Leasa

Working alongside the Vice President for Welfare, the USI Housing Executive, the USI Mental Health Coordinator are will be imperative for the success of the campaigns in the area of Welfare. Here are some of the key areas I want to address, alongside our current policies and the goals of the Vice President for Welfare.

- **Accommodation | Lóistín** - Rolling out Homes.usi.ie to promote digs to students is just one part of a multifaceted campaign on housing and accommodation that we need to advocate for. We must encourage homeowners to provide these places for students. We need to continue to build on the National Housing and Homelessness Campaign and tackle this crisis head on through regulation of the private rental sector, renters and digs rights, create more housing and much more.
- **National Health Campaigns | Feachtais Náisiúnta Sláinte** - From Waterford to Letterkenny, Limerick, Galway and Tallaght, we are seeing a national health crisis unfold with people waiting on trolleys, long waiting lists and inadequate services. We need to support our students and support campaigns such as 'Still Waiting', 'Cardiac Care in South East'. Alongside this, we need to continue to promote and develop our partnership with Video Doc.

- **Sexual Harassment | Ciapadh Gnéis** - USI ran and launched a 'Say Something' survey in 2013, a Study of Students' Experiences of Harassment, Stalking, Violence & Sexual Assault. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, it has become apparent that we need more up to date data on these issues in order for us to campaign more effectively in this area. I want to launch another survey on this area and create a campaign around the results. As part of this I want to provide a toolkit on Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence for SUs.
- **Harm reduction campaign | Feachtas do Laghdú Dochair** – Previous partnerships with the HSE have resulted in brilliant campaigns, we need to review and develop these campaigns. I would like to see it expanded particularly to include harm reduction information on testing kits and including consent for search information.
- **Financial supports | Tacaíocht Airgid** - The government have still not rolled back the cuts to the grant agency rates. So many of our members are affected by this and we should not take it off the table. People returning from Australia after a few years are now being caught by a barrier to grants supports due to the restriction that you must be living in the country 3 out the last 5 years. We also must fight for our part-time students who are not eligible for the same financial supports as full time students e.g. SAF. These can all form part of our key Budget asks.

Equality & Citizenship Campaigns | Feactas Chomhionannais agus Shaoránachta

Working alongside the Vice President for Equality & Citizenship will be crucial for the success of the campaigns in the area of Equality. Here are some of the key areas I want to address, alongside our current policies and the goals of the Vice President For Equality & Citizenship

- **If we Repeal - what's next? | Má aisghairimid - céard é an chéad chéim eile?**
If (when!) we repeal the 8th amendment from the constitution, it won't be the end of the conversation on reproductive rights. We must make sure the government put in suitable services and supports following this. We must also fight for our members in Northern Ireland to have access to abortion healthcare services.
- **Environmental Sustainability | Inmharthanacht na Timpeallachta** - This is one of the most pressing issues of our generation. I want to tackle the Environmental Strategy that I am bringing to Congress. Specific campaigns on issues such as single use straws & plastics and the conscious cup campaign should be tackled nationally.
Creating a guide for SUs on how to audit and improve the environmental impact of their SU, their campus and their events will go a long way. This could include expanding the #StudentSwitchOff other institutions, tackling food waste in canteens, looking at the feasibility of environmental officers, reviewing tenders and procurement procedures, assessing campaign materials, signing up to Green Campus and much more. And I want to see the same reflected in the work of USI where feasible.
- **Refugee Action | Sólathar Díreach** – We need to improve access to education for asylum seekers. Many Universities/Places of Sanctuary have been developed this year

and we should be lobbying for this opportunity on all campuses. We also need to highlight the system of direct provision and campaign for better conditions and services. Within this campaign we need to address and campaign to combat racism.

- **LGBTQ+ | LADTA+** - We may have marriage equality in the Republic of Ireland but our members in the North are not afforded the same rights. This is simply not good enough and USI should work alongside NUS-USI in order to progress this issue.

The fight for the LGBTQI+ community is not over. Trans Healthcare, gender recognition, gender-neutral toilets, removing the MSM 1 year blood ban and mental health are some more areas that we still must campaign for. We also need to expand campaigns so they are not heteronormative such as the 'ToolIntoYou' campaign.

There are many more areas of the Equality & Citizenship brief that we must work on. We must ratify the UNCRPD, we must support our International Students, we need to support our mature students, we tackle the National Access Plan and improve access for lone parents, travellers, people with disabilities and more groups. I want to work alongside the VP for Equality and Citizenship to roll out campaigns to address these issues and more.

Academic Affairs Campaigns | Feachtais Chúrsaí Acadúla

Connecting with our membership on academic issues by working alongside the goals of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, is another area within the Vice President for Campaigns remit.

- **Placement Campaign | Feachtas socrúcháin** - With thorough data already collected this year on Teachers' Placement, we can use this data as a lobbying tool and formulate the next steps of the campaign. We need to look forward at expanding this placement campaign to other areas such as Pharmacy students.
- **Assessment Period Campaigns | Feachtais Tréimhse Mheasúnaithe** - Coming up to exam time can be a challenging time for students. Success and drop out are areas we also need to investigate and by creating campaigns around those key points, I hope to support and equip our members.
- **Postgraduate Students | Mic Léinn iarchéime** - I want to make sure that campaigns are inclusive to PostGrad students - whilst we don't need to reinvent the wheel, we do need to include Postgrads as a spoke. To properly identify the postgrad issues we should campaign on, we need to collect data and look at rolling out a Postgraduate Survey.

Developing links with other unions to further postgrad representation should also be a priority. We need to look at working with TUI and IFUT to work towards a mutual working partnership for postgrads.

- **International affairs | Gnóthaí idirnáisiúnta** - Our international links, such as our relationship with the European Students' Union (ESU), should be highlighted on our various channels as an information campaign.

Union Development | Fhorbairt na NAontas

We need to continue the development of USI as a Union, assist in the development of local unions and the students within those unions.

Union development Strategy 2020 | Straitéis Fhorbairt na NAontas - We need to tackle some of the targets set out in this strategy. We need to better understand the impact of local Students' Union, measure the achievements and set long term goals. We must strive for autonomy, support SUs who are merging to become Technological Universities and we have to support capacity building in Further Education & Training colleges. Great strides have been made this year with the comparative research survey and we should build on this as a learning resource.

Communication | Cumarsáid - Creating a strategic 'USI Awareness campaign', connecting with our current members and expanding our membership needs to be a core piece of our work. I want to look at the feasibility of creating a membership strategy and 'How to Join USI' pack. Promoting USI through our various communication channels, publications and keeping up with social media trends and new features will help our engagement grow.

Training | Teagmháil - Reviewing training based on feedback from current officers is vital in improving the training we provide on behalf of our members. We need to investigate if we should provide training in larger blocks, if we need to refocus our training through different modules and look at the possibility of providing online training modules. Online training resources should be considered as a support to hands-on training modules.

Growth in partnerships | Fás na gComhpháirtíochtaí- We have seen the benefits of partnering already within USI, with great supports from SIPTU and Video Doc. I want to continue to develop relationships and create collaborations with organisations to benefit our members.

Commercial Strategy | Straitéis Tráchtála- Diversifying our income streams in order to grow our resources is important for the suitability and growth of our national union. Creating a commercial strategy is the first step in this diversification.

This is currently a working document as I consult with members on the inclusion of their suggestions.

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