



Congress 2019

Lorna
FOR USI PRESIDENT

Leading the Change

My Vision

As an organisation, USI has the power to massively influence decisions that are taken on a National and International level that affect our members. We have to be ambitious and strong in our unwavering commitment to improving access to higher and further education, publicly funded education, PBSA legislation and HEI built accommodation, tackling the abhorrent system of direct provision and leading the way in the area of climate action. These are all things we should do together.

While I am very proud of the work we have achieved this year and the achievements delivered by teams in the past, I do believe we can benefit from changes within our National Union. If elected, I want to ensure that each student represented by USI get the most out of their affiliation fee. Whether that be through changes in legislation through lobby efforts and actions, budget increases that positively affect students, speaking to USI on their campus or even a social media post that brightens up their day.



I believe in the student movement, I believe in our ability to affect change when we work together but most importantly, I believe students should be at the forefront of all our discussions and decisions.

We have a long and proud history of fighting for issues, both inside and outside of the lecture theatre, that affects students. I want to continue that fight and achieve change that will have a lasting impact on our society, our education system and our future.

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Higher Education Funding

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Studies repeatedly show that higher education has a key role to play in enriching and strengthening the economy and local communities, underpinning the civic, cultural, and social cornerstones of society. It is very likely that the Cassells Report will come back from Europe in the next year. It is also likely the recommendations from Europe will not be in our favour so we need to be ready for that.



We need to mobilise and have thousands of students so angry that they will demand change through lobbying and action. I want to ignite anger on campuses which can be harnessed into action. Our students may think that the situation they are currently is in the best that it can be - our job is to ensure that is not the case. We can use the structures on each campus to do that. We can push that anger into the media. This campaign should be lead from within the movement and built upon externally because of our anger.

"I want to ignite anger on campuses which can be harnessed into action"

> **Link** the messages from the National Campaign on PFE to the manifestos of officers on each campus. Students have already engaged in these issues when they voted in local Students' Union elections so we can continue to build on that engagement by localising the USI campaign.

> **Create** a discussion group for students and Students' Union Officers that we can use to build engagement and anger on this campaign. Gather and publish student stories to build this anger. This should be done in September as a way of advertising any upcoming actions and engaging students in the campaign.

- > **Use interactive workshops** to engage students on these issues including access, fees, SUSI, placement supports, hidden costs of attending higher education and funding for the Higher Education Institution.
- > **Active on the ground** - Encourage and support local actions on different campuses every week to continue building awareness and support.
- > **Lobbying** is one of the most important ways that we will make a change in this area so we should provide lobbying training at the beginning of the year to support Officers and students to lobby on this area
- > **Work with the Coalition** for Publicly Funded Higher Education, THEA and the IUA to ensure our arguments are in line and supportive of publicly funded higher education.



Accommodation

The accommodation crisis that is tearing across the country is going to continue to be one of the main focuses of the Organisation going forward. The reality is that year on year, we have seen new builds in Urban areas that are not what students want or need, we have seen increases in the cost of accommodation, while quality continues to drop. We need to take action now.

- > **Review all** applications to Councils for student accommodation and where feasible, submit observations to the planning process for any luxury student accommodation being built. This is will **create a national wave of observations and apply pressure** to the Government to listen to concerns of students.
- > **Undertake an investigation** into all PBSA and write a report on the current situation faced by students looking for accommodation.
- > **Investigate the possibility** of developing partnerships with organisations to run workshops and clinics on campuses to **ensure students are fully aware of their rights** but are also fully supported in taking any next steps/actions against landlords.
- > **Intensify our lobby effort** with the Government to invest in HEI Build Student Accommodation.
- > **Encourage and support** local actions in towns and cities around the country where student accommodation is unaffordable, sub-standard and/or unsuitable on a regular basis to continue to force action.

Changing the way we **ENGAGE**

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As a representative organisation for over **374,000 students**, we need to assess the way we currently engage with our members. Students should remain at the core of all that we do and I believe we can do more to directly engage with students. Students' Union teams will always be our first point of call for learning about each campus but I understand that sometimes, Officers can be extremely busy and miss an opportunity to share information about USI work and campaigns. The **link between USI Officer Board and Students' Unions is a number one priority for me**, and I feel that when we work together we can be a positive force that students need to represent them every day.



- > **Ensure** USI Officer Board create **monthly updates for Students' Unions** to include in emails, post on social media and send to Class Reps in advance of Class Rep Council meetings.
- > Create **new virtual groups** on different areas such as students with disabilities, gender equality and LGBTQ+ students to facilitate discussion, knowledge sharing and promotion of events or campaigns. The membership for these groups can include Students' Union officers, Class Representatives/Student Councillors and students who are interested in or working on issues within each area. This will help to **ensure USI is more proactive** on issues facing students.
- > Build on the work of previous campaigns and **engage directly with clubs and societies** to learn from and talk to students who might not be involved with their Students' Union but are active on campus.
- > Attend at least one Council or event launch in each Member Organisation to **build a relationship with students** directly.
- > **Develop interactive sessions** that can be used on Campus Visits and Council meetings to gather information from students about what they would like to see from their National Union and data that we can use to facilitate our work on different areas. Improve the USI website and ensure the information is accessible and relevant.

Students should remain at the core of all that we do and I believe we can do more to directly engage with students



Changing the way we WORK TOGETHER

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Ní neart go cur le chéile. As previously mentioned, we have an uncertain political climate ahead that will directly affect our members. We need a strong and connected movement to face these challenges head first to ensure our members are at the fore of the decision-making process.

- > **Conduct a democratic review** of all democratic structures within the organisation to ensure they are suitable and easy to engage with while also improving transparency and accountability.
- > **Investigate** the possibility of enhancing our use of technology to ensure our members can fully engage in our structures.
- > **Commit** to conducting a **value impact assessment of USI** to ensure our members feel the value from their affiliation fee and this type of review will be a positive step in achieving that.
- > **Initiate** the development of a **USI Strategic Plan** taking the value audit and democratic review into account.

Training

To ensure our movement is strong, we need to ensure that students and Students' Union officers are confident and have the skills necessary to lead the fight on their campus and on a national level. USI needs to ensure the strength of the movement and that comes from the strength within our MO's.

- > For this to happen, I believe we need to **access the skills base** and needs of our officers and organise pieces of training to meet those needs. These assessments should be for all officers so ensure every officer is equipped with the skills they need to best represent their students.
- > We also need to have **formal structures to access** the effectiveness of our training.
- > Adjust the timing and location of training provided and ensure there are ongoing training opportunities for all officers.
- > Introduce **training options for individual officers** and teams such as governance training, financial management and reporting, facilitation training, negotiation training and effective chairing training.

Transparency & Accountability

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I believe we can do more to be transparent and accountable in our goals and actions. We should be leading by example in this area and to ensure our members have access to all relevant information.

> **USI is linked** with The Governance Code since 2017 and is registered as 'on the journey' in efforts to become accountable, transparent and better governed which means there are key goals that we have to reach. The Governance Code is a resource to assist community, voluntary and charity (CVC) organisations develop their overall capacity in terms of how they run their organisation and places a greater emphasis on values, accountability, transparency, probity, maintaining control, leadership and the diversity of opinions and skills. These **represent best practice** in an organisation like USI. I believe we **need to continue this work** and **communicate our work to achieve** these goals more regularly to National Council and our members through our website and regular updates at National Council.

> To help us **achieve our goals**, we should set KPI's for our campaigns and projects. These will be set by the Officer with responsibility for the area and the USI President. These will then be discussed at National Council. This will allow us to measure our outputs and will facilitate continuous improvement.

> USI Officer Board work plans are approved by National Council at the beginning of the year but in the interest of accountability, we should **report back to National Council** on our progress in reaching the goals outlined within these plans. This will be done at the December National Council and at the last National Council of the year.

> Continue to **meet the requirements** as decided by Congress each year in terms of accountability and transparency.

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Union Development

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This should be a two-pronged approach. We need to develop USI as an organisation and also support our Member Organisations to develop.

- > **Review the current USI Union Development Strategy.** While the content is quite good, it was very ambitious to complete and the timelines are no longer relevant. We can engage Member Organisations in this process to develop and deliver on a strategy that is achievable.
- > **Continue to increase and support** applications for grant and external funding for campaigns and/or events with the relevant Policy Officer.
- > Gather and share resources from **our international colleagues** to support our members in their development.
- > **Gather and share resources** from our members which can support other MO's to continue to develop. This should focus on both organisational structures and commercial activities.
- > Lobby for **additional support for merging** Students' Unions.
- > Work to **develop and support existing relationships** between student and staff representative groups to lobby for supports that benefit students.
- > Develop resources to **support the development of Students' Unions** in Further Education Colleges.
- > **Develop a legislative framework** for Student Partnership based on best practice.
- > **Lobby for** the introduction of a **legislative definition of an autonomous** Students' Union.

Irish Language

We are surrounded by examples of how a national union can provide campaign materials and information bilingually, take a look at NUS Wales for example. We have a mandate that needs to be met and here is how I propose we do this:

- > I want to **restructure the USI website** to give you the option of reading it as Gaeilge or in English.
- > We must **continue to drive the campaign for the implementation of Gaeltacht grants**, it is unacceptable that our young learners must pay extortionate fees on top of what they are already being forced to pay in order to gain a degree in what is constitutionally their first language.
- > **Continue to support the work by students** in societies that will build our work on a National Level.

We must continue to work in partnership with NUS-USI to deliver on our promises to our members in Northern Ireland but also to learn from the practices and experiences of students and Member Organisations in Northern Ireland.

- > **Work together** with on the fallout of Brexit using both the NUS-USI and USI Brexit Strategies.
- > **Lobby the Irish Government** prior to the review of the decision to offer support for prospective higher education students planning to study in the UK and for UK nationals wishing to attend colleges in Ireland for the academic year 20/21.
- > Where possible, **develop editable cross-border campaigns** to support NUS-USI campaigns. The issues are similar but the detail can differ however, we can work together to reduce duplication of resources.
- > **Engage with NUS-USI to campaign for reproductive health care** is accessible in Northern Ireland.
- > Engage with **NUS-USI to campaign for marriage equality** in Northern Ireland.
- > **Review the NUS-USI plan of work** and work together on projects that making links between campaigns through engaging with NUs-USI Officers.

Technological Universities

This year, we have seen the creation of our first Technological University. This is a very exciting new chapter for the Higher Education scene in Ireland. Coming from a Students' Union engaging with the TU process, I understand the importance of ensuring students are at the centre of the decision-making process when applying for designation and throughout the process.

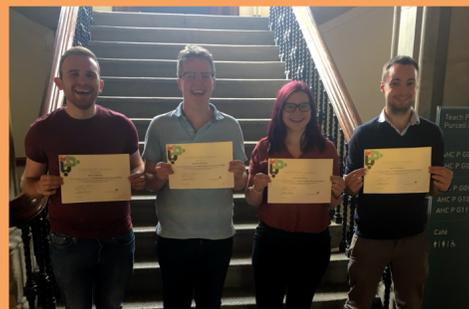
- > **Create a TU Sub-Committee** of National Council that can meet regularly to discuss their situation with other Unions going through this process.
- > **Facilitate meetings of merging SU teams** at the beginning of their term, with follow up meetings every 3 months or as regularly as deemed necessary by both parties.
- > **Lobby relevant bodies** to ensure Students' Union Officers are included in all levels of decision making for the development of the Technological University and following designation.

General Election

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While there is no confirmation of a General Election during 2019/2020, it is extremely likely. If an election is called, USI will need to be at the forefront of campaigning to ensure the issues faced by students are their priority.

- > **Provide short lobby training** for students to provide them with the skills needed to lobby their local election candidates.
- > I would like to **develop an additional section to our lobby documents** that are regionally based so that students and Officers can use examples that are relevant to their location.
- > **Support local Students' Unions in organising local hustings** with all candidates. We should live stream or share these links so that we can learn from each other and use clips from the stream to hold candidates to account.



Additional

- > **Continue to support the SIPTU Big Start Campaign** to ensure a fair wage for Early Years Educators.
- > **Develop and run a "Know Your Union's" Campaign** that can help to raise awareness for the local Students' Union, USI and Trade Unions.
- > Work with **political parties and manifesto writers** to get **USI goals** into their manifestos.
- > **Support the Officer Board team** to achieve their goals in a fast-paced but supportive environment.
- > **Create a culture within the organisation** to ensure we work in the most efficient manner.



The Student Movement and Me

Lorna
FOR AMLÉ PRESIDENT

As a business and human resource management graduate, I have had the pleasure of being involved in the student movement for the last 8 years. I got the SU bug in my first year, starting out as a class representative. I had the honour of being IT Carlow Students' Union Equality Officer in 2016, registering thousands of students to vote and organising events to promote the Marriage Equality referendum.

From there, I ran to become Deputy President for Education & Welfare and enjoyed every minute of organising campaigns and helping students on a daily basis. While I loved the role, I recognised there was an opportunity to introduce changes within the Institute and the Union so I ran for President.

During my time in IT Carlow Students' Union, I had been very involved with USI. From attending National Councils and holding USI Officers to account, to representing USI with international affairs work with the European Students' Union, I knew I had more to give and so I ran for Vice President for the Southern Region.

My role this year is an absolute joy, I get to be on campuses directly engaging with students and hearing about their experiences. I get to support Students' Unions to develop their structures and roll out campaigns and events. I am running to become the President of the Union of Students in Ireland because I believe in our movement, I believe in our ability to affect change when we work together but most importantly because I believe in making sure that students are at the centre of all that we do. I have plans to introduce changes to the organisation that will have a positive lasting impact.

Since I started college, I have put every ounce of myself into this movement and I hope you will give me the opportunity to continue doing so.

My Experience

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- > **Current Vice President for the Southern Region** engaging with students and Students' Union Officers on a daily basis.
- > Ensured a **successful rollout of USI campaigns** on campuses with students and Officers.
- > **Supported local Students' Unions** within my region with issues they face on a daily basis in their college.
- > Supported Students' Unions to **develop and roll out campaigns and events**.
- > **Meeting and discussing issues** with students on their campuses.
- > Supported Students' Unions to **register thousands of students across the region**.
- > **Prepared written updates for Council's** to ensure they were aware of the work that USI was doing for them.
- > **Worked with Further Education College students** to develop and improve the Students' Unions structures and student representation within their colleges.
- > **Represented USI** within the European Students' Union (ESU).
- > **Supported the members of National Council** who attended ESU events through circulating and discussing relevant documentation and policies in advance of events.
- > Member of the **International Working Group on Mental Health** and International Task Force for Women's Representation.
- > Previous **National Council representative on USI Finance Committee**.
- > **Two-term President and Deputy President for Education & Welfare** in IT Carlow Students' Union. I also **held the position of Equality Officer** and represented my class for 3 years within the Union.
- > **Reviewed a number of policies that directly affected students** such as RPL policy, learner progression and retention policy, assessment regulations and student charter.
- > **Developed a new Constitution** in consultation with the student body which passed by 98%.
- > **Introduced a fourth full-time officer for Education and Lifelong Learning** students in the Students' Union.
- > **Overhauled the democratic and accountability structures** within the Students' Union.
- > **Introduced new income sources** to support the Students' Union.
- > Lobbying and **secured an increased budget for the Students' Union** for three years.
- > **Eradicated the Students' Union €100,000 deficit** and left the Union with a surplus.
- > **Developed a new Finance Committee** for the Students' Union to ensure financial governance.