

USI Congress 2019
1 - 4 April



Oisín Hassan **For USI President**

*A Vision for the Future of
the Student Movement*

INTRODUCTION

A chairde,

The student movement has provided crucial space for 60 years in our colleges and in wider society to demand a better future for all students.

As a movement we fought apartheid, for civil rights in the North, called for marriage equality in the 1970s, struck out for abortion access when no one else would, secured grant reform, and brought an end to fees in the 1990s. As a result USI as a collective is recognised as a core constituent of public life in Ireland today. Yet, when we refer to student activism and leadership many of our members do not identify with those labels. That's not because they don't share in our values and ethos, it's simply that we haven't always found the best ways to activate their voice and to make them feel included in our efforts. By unlocking their voice we can challenge the Government on fees and grants, on accommodation and homelessness, and on issues of social justice.

USI and our Member Organisations have achieved great things. The nature of a Union is a belief in collectivism, shared purpose, and solidarity.

In my manifesto I've laid out the direction I believe USI must take in the year ahead, but also crucially, the organisational change that must take place to ensure we are effective for our members. That process of change must include our members, not only to hear their views and experiences, but also to activate them on the issues they care about like grants and accommodation.

I didn't always feel part of the student movement. I thought my own Students' Union needed to do more to challenge those in power. That's why I ran for election - to challenge and to be critical. By being challenging we can fundamentally reshape how students are viewed - not as consumers to be walked all over, but as active and critical partners in our education.

I ask for your support to become the next President of the Union of Students in Ireland, so that we can continue to build a movement for the benefit of all students.

In Unity,
Oisín



MY WORK IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

About Me

After serving as the USI Deputy President, Vice President for Academic Affairs and as a Sabbatical Officer in Queen's University Belfast Students' Union, you'd be forgiven for thinking that I was actively engaged in the student movement from my first day in college. But I didn't get engaged in my Students' Union until my final year - I just didn't think they had much to offer. I realised over time that students who were unhappy or disengaged needed to be involved to change things - so that's what I did. After enrolling in my Masters course I realised just how much worse things could get - I was working full-time below minimum wage and studying full-time. I saw the bureaucratic face of my college up close and it drove me to take my interest in student representation further. I ran for VP Equality and Diversity, a role focused on under-represented groups across campus, including LGBTQ+ students, women students, ethnic minority students, part-time students, international and postgraduate students. I've never looked back - representing students in all their diversity is something I have striven to do to the best of my abilities ever since.

QUB Students' Union

- Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences Rep
- Postgraduate Rep on SU Council
- Co-founded society to tackle student poverty, set up food banks, and collect donations for the emerging refugee crisis
- Elected sabbatical Vice President for Equality & Diversity and Vice President for Education
- Campaigned to end the MSM Blood Ban and ran QUB For Love (marriage equality)
- Introduced and supported 12 Part-Time Officer positions
- Developed the Diversity Ambassadors scheme and training
- Ran International Buddy Scheme, intercultural, and interfaith events
- 'Bogs For All' campaign resulting in first gender neutral toilets in QUB
- Secured QUB Trans Equality Policy
- PGR Report on working conditions that resulted in a groundbreaking fair pay policy
- Ensured QUB stopped publicly calling for tuition fee increases through a media campaign
- Prevented 2 course closures and staff job losses in 'Save Our Schools' campaign
- Part of 'Take Back Queens' a joint student-staff campaign against marketisation of QUB
- Developed online Course Rep voting and nomination to elect over 700 Reps
- Developed an award winning 'Rep Academy' training 240 Reps
- Secured agreement for a Student Partnership Framework
- Overhauled Personal Tutoring for all students and created the 'Fit to Sit' campaign
- Represented students on issues such as disability/accessibility, appeals, disciplinary, PhD supervisory issues

MY WORK IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

The Union of Students in Ireland

- Secured expansion of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) in 2019
- Lobbied Department for a National Student Partnership Agreement and an SU Framework to support our MOs
- Secured strategic dialogues with the Department to ensure access to key officials on policy and budgets
- Developed exam success campaigns and materials and worked on raising awareness of fees and grants issues
- Coordinated the Pharmacy Students' Campaign report and rally and continuing to lobby to lower fees and expand SUSI
- Developed and revamped the USI Budget Submissions for 2019 and 2020
- Secured 'Student Success' as a key strategic priority for the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
- Secured Student Associate Interns paid €13.96 an hour in the National Forum
- Working on a joint agreement with QQI on students in quality assurance
- Working with SOLAS on exploring student representation in Further Education
- Worked on Technological Universities Bill amendments
- Developed 'Academic Representation Insights' and class rep best practice
- Created campaign tools and materials for class rep recruitment locally & nationally
- Developed a Postgrad Rep Network, ran the first Postgraduate Symposium, and developed a Postgraduate Students' Strategy
- Proposed and passed the first paid Vice President for Postgrad Affairs in Europe



MY WORK IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

The Union of Students in Ireland

- Ensured USI joined Eurodoc (European Council of Doctoral Candidates)
- Co-organised the Student-Centred Approaches conference with over 200 delegates
- Represented our members at the European Students' Union and at the Paris Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process
- Contributed to international publication 'Bologna with Student Eyes'
- Coordinated the Student Achievement Awards Ireland nominations and gala
- Developed policy and guidance on student loans, grants, career guidance, centres of research training, assessment, student engagement, digitalisation and student data, online learning, and Leaving Cert reform
- Represented students and Students' Union issues to SUSI, developing clearer guidance
- Developed Students' Union Mergers guidance and toolkits, especially for SUs merging as a result of Technological Universities
- Coordinated USI's most successful Lobby of the Oireachtas ever with 130 TDs/Senators attending
- Secured seminar funding for 'Student Success' to engage staff and students
- Represented students in the media on fees, accommodation, consent, sustainability, SUSI issues, and much more.
- Represented students on the QQI Board, National Forum Board, ISSE Steering, NStEP Steering, and a myriad of committees and decision-making bodies.
- Supported the work of USI as Deputy President 2018-19



FIGHTING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

We must dismantle financial burdens on students

After years of cuts in funding, the imposition of €3000 fees for undergrads, spiralling fees for postgrad and international students, and cuts to SUSI grants, burdens on students have never been higher. With rising costs of living in the midst of a housing crisis, it is clear Government can no longer ignore the plight of students and the responsibility they have to protect access. USI fought attempts to introduce a Graduate Tax, we halted the rise in fees and cuts to grants, and influenced the Cassells Report to include publicly funded HE as a core option for change. Over the past few years USI ensured that the cosy political consensus in favour of income contingent student loans was smashed. Government has now kicked the can down the road, unable to implement their preferred option of student loans.

In 2019 the movement decided that #EducationIs had run its course as a national campaign, instead focusing on the Coalition for Publicly Funded Higher Education's slogan of #FundTheFuture.

Activism

- Grow the Coalition, ensuring it can organise on campuses with Students' Unions and Trade Unions, and can successfully lobby politicians and political parties.
- Organise Coalition members ahead of a General Election and during subsequent government negotiations is critical
- Referral of the Cassells Report to the European Structural Reform Programme represents a real threat to our efforts to secure an accessible, quality, and debt-free education, so we must renew our efforts to undermine arguments for student loans.
- Work with National Council and a reformed Campaigns Sub-Committee to organise the movement around national days of action in both Semester 1 and 2.
- Support Vice Presidents for the Regions to organise, train, and co-ordinate activist groups with Member Organisations on campus.
- Roll-out campaign materials for year long awareness raising among students. Many are unaware that the cost of education has rocketed. We must activate a broader base of our members.
- Work with MOs to seek their thoughts on holding referenda on campuses to build a clear national consensus on the student demand for funding ahead of any General Election.

FIGHTING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

Lobbying on Fees and Grants

- Develop a USI Student Cost of Living Index that ensures we are the national reference point and that we can stand over accurate figures and evidence.
- Capture student stories as part of a wider effort on social media, online and print media, and in our lobby documents to ensure we are truly representative and impactful
- Call for a wide-ranging public review on SUSI Grants and student finances to hear testimony and evidence from students
- Seek amendments to the Student Support Act 2011 to be tabled on the floor of the Oireachtas
- Revamp Budget Submissions to tell more of a narrative about the current state of third-level funding
- Utilise new strategic dialogues with the Department of Education and Skills to ensure we are actively arguing our case with officials in advance of Budget 2020.
- Build on our previous lobby efforts with County Councils.



FIGHTING THE ACCOMMODATION CRISIS

Government must take action on housing and homelessness for students and society

The truth is that we could secure a cut to fees and a rise in SUSI grants tomorrow morning, and another 11% rise in rents would wipe out that extra financial support won for our students. The housing and homelessness crisis is ripping the very heart of our society apart, and students are not immune to the crisis. Across the state students are sleeping in cars, staying with friends on sofas and floors, sleeping in mattresses in cupboards, and sharing bunk beds. Many more are now choosing not to go to college, choosing the closest college rather than the course they really wanted, or choosing to commute 7 hours a day. Yet Government is sitting on their hands and refusing to accept criticism of their strategy.

USI National Strategy

- As the Government's National Student Accommodation Strategy comes up for review we must ensure that the next Strategy places more emphasis on building public purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) for and by HEIs. There must be a recognition from Government that reducing costs is integral to alleviating pressure.
- Challenge Government strategy that relies on 'luxury' student accommodation to meet their targets.
- USI should develop its own national strategy for student accommodation with expert guidance, setting out the wide-ranging need for reform, for public investment, and for new legislation. This strategy can be utilised to lobby for change to Government policy through our seat on the Interdepartmental Student Accommodation Working Group.
- Revamp our Budget Submission ask on accommodation to reinforce the need to invest in PBSA on campus.
- Ensure funding is secured for the 'Homes for Study' campaign and research
- USI should host open meetings on student accommodation with political parties.



FIGHTING THE ACCOMMODATION CRISIS



Student Rights

- USI should develop a more hard-hitting national campaign starting in the summer to improve the awareness of students and their families on tenancy rights. We must find radical ways to target rogue landlords and tackle the fear students have when considering reporting their landlord.
- We must build on the student activism of Shanowen and Cuirt na Coiribe, organising and activating our students to challenge rent hike injustices. We should also redouble efforts to take cases to the RTB and should consider the use of rent strikes.
- As part of the USI National Strategy we need a set of Student Accommodation Principles. HEIs should be invited to sign-up to these principles, including the principle that HEIs should not be increasing rents.
- USI should work with local MOs to review areas of high student density and identify landlords who are not registered with the RTB. These landlords should be reported en masse to flood the system and force action on the quality of housing.
- Include a focus on international student exploitation in our work, through the national strategy, in lobby efforts, and to ensure legislation is robustly enforced when they are squeezed for high deposits and have their rights infringed.
- Challenge anti-student accommodation rhetoric when peddled by politicians, and by proactively seeking meetings with key party officials to clamp down on politicians who break party lines and seek to block planning permission for PBSA.

UNION DEVELOPMENT

Supporting our member Students' Union to be the best they can be!

Did you know that USI once had a full-time Union Development Officer? Since that role disappeared we've still been undertaking Union development work, but it hasn't been as structured or obvious. It's time that changed. I've undertaken to develop a National Student Partnership Agreement that would enshrine a national Framework that recognises the role and value of Students' Unions in Ireland, and also worked on developing resources for SU mergers and good governance. I want to see Union Development become central to our movement once more.

- We must lobby on the upcoming Higher Education Authority Bill (replacing the HEA Act 1971) to include a section on Students' Union and their autonomy. This is a crucial Bill.
- Through USI's agreed Strategic Dialogues with the Department of Education and Skills we can secure a National Student Partnership Agreement and an SU Framework that will support SU development.
- Utilise our lobby efforts and relationships with THEA and the Department to secure additional support and/or funding for Students' Union undergoing a merger process as a result of the Technological Universities Act 2018.
- Ensure the USI Officer Board Plan of Work has a specific UD section that pulls together areas of work from across our mandates and policy areas.
- Work with Vice Presidents for the Regions to support them to roll out workshops, initiatives, training, and advice to MOs relevant to their needs.
- Work on a Technological Universities Student Voice mid-term review paper to lobby for greater student representation and input on the TU process.
- Develop USI's Associate Membership



FUTURE OF USI

As USI enters its 60th year we must reflect on where we have come from, the work that we do, how we do it, and where we are heading. It's now time for us to set out the future of our movement, to reach more students, and to strengthen our role as the national voice of third-level students in Ireland.

USI Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025

- Roll out a campaign of engagement across our Member Organisations to reach students and ask them what they think/know about USI and what matters to them. This will require a clear branding exercise that elevates our current brand, informs students on our work, and includes exciting means to gather opinions and thoughts.
- Hold workshops and dialogue with MO Sabbatical Officers, PTOs, and Class Reps to hear their views on the future direction of USI.
- Meet with SU staff to consider how best we can support Students' Unions and their needs. Linking in with ASUA (Association of Students' Union staff) is key to this work.
- Hold a series of meetings and strategic dialogues with our partners and other external organisations on their views of USI and how to strengthen relationships/existing work.
- Launch a draft Mission Statement and Strategy for consultation and feedback before bringing it to Congress 2020 for debate and approval.

Annual Planning and Communications

- Develop one overall Officer Board Plan of Work and make it more accessible to our members.
- Develop a draft annual calendar that is linked to the USI Officer Board Plan of Work and circulate this calendar in August 2019 to Sabbatical Officers.
- Relaunch our monthly newsletter for students with a revamped look and feel.
- Examine the optimum way to inform Sabbatical Officers about our work, specifically with a weekly round-up email on the key things they need to know.
- Launch an 'Events' section on our website and ensure these are mirrored on social media.



FUTURE OF USI

Membership Training

USI offers one of the most robust and comprehensive training schedules of any National Union of Students in Europe. We must ensure it remains relevant and exciting.

- A more robust review of SUT and SUT+ involving Officers and staff in early Semester 2.
- More focus on HR, governance, and finance training for Presidents so that they feel prepared and supported in their roles throughout the year.
- Support Regional VPs to roll-out a series of Part-Time Officers Trainings on campuses, tailored to each MO and their needs.

Supporting Our People

- Develop a calendar of team training for Officer Board, focused on the Summer. This should include facilitation training so that VPs for Regions can develop a series of workshops to roll out to Sabbatical Officers and students.
- Ensure USI is an attractive place for staff to work by assessing their professional development needs and offering enriching opportunities.
- Internally audit our procedures and put in place new internal protocols for good governance.
- Undertake significant reforms based on the impending Governance Review.
- Undertake a financial review of USI and of current expenditure.

GENERAL ELECTION

Amplifying and mobilising the student voice

It is likely that the Government will fall in 2019/2020 and USI must be ready for the General Election campaign that ensues.

- Develop a wide-ranging GE Student Manifesto and seek the approval of every Class Rep and Student Council in our membership for that manifesto to ensure buy-in.
- Lobby every candidate in the country to support the asks and demands in that Manifesto.
- Seek to ensure that political manifestos include student asks through lobbying politicians and meeting with manifesto drafters and policy advisers.
- Support the VP Equality & Citizenship and VPs for the Regions to mobilise voter registration and 'get out the vote' campaigns'.

NUS-USI: OUR CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT

A cross-border movement united to protect our students and our fragile peace.

As the first Northerner elected to Officer Board in 13 years (who was not in the position of NUS-USI President) I hope that I have been an authentic voice for all of our members, yet I recognise so much more must to be done to ensure we are truly inclusive and understanding of the North. In the 1970s pioneering student leaders united in the face of division and violence. In the face of Brexit and an uncertain future for our island it is time to renew our commitment to that unity and solidarity.

- Building on the success of our joint Brexit lobby in the European Parliament USI should work with NUS-USI to lobby the Government in Dublin on the issues of Brexit.
- USI and NUS-USI should begin more constant dialogue on Brexit issues as they arise - we don't know what the full impact of Brexit will be, but we will all too soon.
- Set up a Brexit Taskforce of National Council to develop campaigns and monitor the rights of students post-withdrawal
- Prepare a contingency plan to mobilise students from the North and the UK to vote in the event of a second referendum.
- Ensure that the USI Plan of Work has specific NUS-USI related actions and that all Vice Presidents for policy have considered NUS-USI needs in their work
- Ensure that all campaigns have relevant aspects and materials for the North.
- Protect and promote the Trilateral Agreement more proactively, especially considering the turmoil and financial difficulties in NUS UK.



A MOVEMENT THAT SETS THE AGENDA

Setting the national policy agenda while rolling out innovative and accessible student-led campaigns

It is imperative that our campaigning and advocacy is agile and proactive, reflecting the needs and views of students, championing progressive change on and off campus.

- As part of reviewing communications and strategy we need to reimagine how we roll-out campaigns, roadshows, and materials. We must optimise our resources for the benefit of our students and MOs.
- Our work must be informed by policy and evidence. This is something I have championed in my own work, and as President I want to ensure USI can grow it's capacity to develop sound policies based on research and student engagement.
- We must build alliances among students, societies, and advocacy groups to progress our activist reach - be that to engage more students on issues of mental health and stigma, to include more diversity in our representation, to challenge societal ills like Direct Provision, or to build on our strong foundations on issues like LGBTQ+ and abortion rights.
- An gaeilge continues to expand in our organisation, so supporting the work of the second full-time Leas Uachtarán don Ghaeilge is imperative to our success as an inclusive organisation, both North and South.
- Supporting the inclusion of postgrads, especially in research degrees, through the work of the VP Postgraduate Affairs is crucial to breaking down barriers to participation and representation. We must 'postgrad proof' our plan of work.
- Regional organisation remains central to USI's success. A more structured engagement with students, beginning with a USI strategic planning campaign, will allow the opportunity for us to create a more supportive environment for our MOs and Regional VPs.
- Seek meaningful ways to increase grant and project funding and to increase our staffing, be that full-time or through well-paid student internships.
- Commit to a plan of expenditure on website development to reach more students.
- Build more links with Trade Unions across all aspects of Irish life, and ensure that our work communicates the benefits of Union membership to students as workers, and to reach apprentices through a coordinated democratisation and workers rights programme.
- Develop our Further Education and Training student membership through partnership with SOLAS, and increase engagement with Northern FE College SUs.

A Vision for the Future of the Student Movement

Over the past 2 years I have had the privilege of representing students across Ireland at the national level as your Vice President for Academic Affairs. My time in Queen's taught me a lot about myself and the passion I had for standing up for the rights of our students, be they oppressed by archaic laws and attitudes, ignored by Governments, or by a college that refused to listen to their needs.

My appointment as your Deputy President this year was an honour I will never forget. It made me realise that I can step up to the mark, building on my previous experience across a range of issues students face, and lead the movement to ensure it can achieve the best for all our members.

I have challenged the falsehood that third-level education cannot change too fast, or include too many. I have challenged social injustice from the early days of my time as a student. I have also built relationships and respect for the movement across decision-making bodies, ensuring the voice of students was valued, and crucially, that it was the first voice sought in discussions and debate.

I believe that education is a fundamental right at all levels, especially if we are to ensure all members of society can live and work in prosperity. As a movement I know that we can renew our collective commitment to that ideal.

I want to lead the student movement to build on our fight for funding, for rights, and for social justice. I want to lead a confident and progressive movement - a movement that remains at the forefront of Irish society and remains able to challenge injustices in education.

I hope that during this election you will get a chance to discuss my vision for the future of the student movement with me, and I hope that you will lend me your support to be the next President of USI.

Oisín

The background is a collage of various images related to Oisín Hassan's work and life. It includes a man speaking at a podium, a group of students holding protest signs in front of a large building, a man and a woman smiling, a group of students holding signs with percentages, a man and a woman smiling, a group of students holding a large Irish flag, and a man speaking at a podium with a USI banner. The collage is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

OISÍN HASSAN

FOR USI PRESIDENT



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