



# **Union of Students in Ireland**

*Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn*

## **Submission to the citizens assembly on gender equality**

### **Introduction**

The Union of Students in Ireland represents 374,000 students across the island of Ireland and has been working relentlessly in the area of gender equality for decades. USI were key stakeholders in the creation of the Consent framework which was brought into ensure an institutional campus culture is safe, respectful and supportive. USI have been an integral part of the process from the beginning, to work towards ending gender based violence on campuses and improve education around consent on college campuses.

USI was also central for decades to the fight for abortion rights in Ireland from the case of SPUC v Grogan, and mobilised thousands of students in campaign for Marriage Equality and the Repeal of the 8th amendment.

### **Context**

We would like to preempt this submission by saying that USI believes that none of these issues can be discussed without mentioning gender based violence and how it been historically used to oppress women, thus contributing to inequalities in society. We would also like to state that our approach to this submission has been to recognise intersectional identities, by that we mean that we recognise that a women of colour or a disabled women may have more barriers in their way towards getting into positions of leadership, and may face a greater gender pay gap etc.

## **Theme 1: Gender norms and stereotypes**

We need to challenge the barriers and social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender discrimination towards girls and boys, women and men. There are still massive gender norms and stereotypes that feed into society today. These stereotypes place unfair assumptions on genders. There are a few ways in which we suggest to tackle these social norms.

### **Education:**

From as early as primary school, all the way through to third level education, the Irish education system should be teaching children that there is no stereotypical man or woman. The school system should challenge social norms.

LGBTQ+ education in schools is needed to ensure that non-binary people are being represented and not left out of the conversation and are treated equally.

### **Campaigns:**

An example of an effective campaign to tackle social norms is The 20 x 20 Campaign is a national, all-inclusive movement to shift Ireland's cultural perceptions of women's sport by 2020.

The campaign aims are:

- 20% increase in media coverage of women in sport
- 20% increase in female participation at all levels of sports
- 20% increased in attendance at women's games and events

USI are in full support of furthering equality for women in sports. Campaigns with goals like these are a great example of tackling social norms and stereotypes that Society has created for different genders.

USI believe there should be more campaigns introduced in the education system to tackle the social norms and stereotypes placed on genders.

As mentioned above about gender based violence towards women, consent needs to be taught in schools.

## **Theme 2: Work: gender discrimination and occupational segregation by gender**

USI recognises there is a national problem in relation to the gender pay gap. In the third level education section, those who tend to be in senior leadership positions are men, while those in low pay precarious work are majority women.

Some of the work that needs to be done here is a cultural change as well as structural. USI supports more research in this area and will campaign for an end to the gender pay gap.

### **Theme 3: Care, paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility**

In this area we recognise in particular the needs of Mature students, student parents, students who may have caring responsibilities,

USI recognises the importance of care and caring responsibilities. From the student perspective, it is imperative that these responsibilities are recognised by the state, and do not act as a barrier to education. USI acknowledges that many students are also student parents, and to this end from the third level perspective would advocate for the following:

- Publicly funded education, to allow as much participation in education as possible
- Quality, affordable childcare on campuses and in wider society.
- An increase to the Back to Education Allowance
- a review of the SUSI grant criteria

### **Theme 4: Women's access to, and representation in, public life and decision making - Leadership**

#### **Leadership**

USI supports targeted initiatives that encourage women to run for positions of leadership. While quotas go some ways towards addressing the issue, women who are running for election or who may run for election need to be supported every step of the way. This means support for community programmes that provide resources to marginalised communities.

By way of example USI has run Women Lead since 2015, an initiative aimed at encouraging women to run for elected positions in their Students' Unions. Pink training is a similar initiative for LGBT+ people. As a result of events like these we have seen steady increases in representation.

USI would like to see the expansion of the Athena swan initiative in HEIs which promotes female leadership.

USI would also call for Audits and records to kept about female representatives at varying levels of leadership.

### **Closing remarks**

USI is very grateful to be given the opportunity to submit our recommendations to the citizens assembly on gender equality and wishes the assembly well in their work. It is only with cultural and structural changes for all minority groups that we will live in an equal society.

### **Other relevant USI Submissions**

- Submission to the department of health on access to publicly funded contraception scheme
- Submission to the committee of justice and equality on the issues of Online Harassment, harmful communications and related offenses