



Written Submission to CORU Draft Statement Of Strategy 2021-2025

November 2020

About USI

The Union of Students in Ireland (Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn) is the national representative body for third-level Students' Unions in Ireland. Founded in 1959, USI now represents more than 374,000 students in over thirty colleges across the island of Ireland. The goal of USI is to work for the rights of students and a fair and equal third-level education system in Ireland. USI is a full member of the European Students' Union (ESU) which represents students from 46 National Students' Unions in 39 countries and of Eurodoc, the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers.

USI Response to the CORU Draft Statement of Strategy

USI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the CORU Draft Statement of Strategy 2021-25. USI has developed this response in collaboration with our member Students' Unions through whom we collectively represent the interests of students on CORU-accredited programmes, and in other professions for which CORU will be commencing registration processes as part of the new Statement of Strategy.

USI's response will be broken down into three main areas, which we believe are of importance for CORU to consider as part of its' new statement of strategy, but we will try to link these suggestions to relevant areas of the draft statement of strategy. The three areas this consultation response will focus on are:

- **Engagement with students as 'future professionals'**
- **Communication between CORU, students and providers**
- **Placement and Work-Based Learning**

Engagement with students as ‘future professionals’

USI notes the reference to collaboration with CORU’s partners as an enabler to the successful delivery of this strategy. USI fully agrees that collaboration with education partners is vital to the successful delivery of the strategy and believes that students, as future health and social care professionals are the central partner in education. It is extremely important that CORU engages with students on all relevant professional programmes of education. This is particularly important as colleges engage in programme approval to be able to offer CORU-recognised programmes of education, and where standards of proficiency for professions are being designed and updated.

Looking at the development of ‘appropriate governance and funding model’ as a key enabler of the strategy, it is important that CORU considers how students, as future professionals can best be incorporated into their governance procedures. This could be through structured forms of engagement with students that feed into CORU’s overarching governance model or through students being formally represented in CORU’s governance structures - in line with current practice within Irish Higher Education where students are recognized as playing a central role in all aspects governance of their Higher Education Institutions.

Looking to Strategic Priority Two on anchoring CORU’s regulatory interventions in evidence-based research and insights, it is pivotal that students are engaged as a core stakeholder in the review of education standards, codes and guidance, in line with best practice in national and international quality assurance processes. Where programmes of education are undergoing accreditation or review, it is pivotal that students on the relevant programmes play a central role in this process, again in line with quality assurance working norms in Ireland.

In line with the above, USI also wishes to acknowledge the ongoing work being carried out between professional and regulatory bodies, including CORU and QQI, the quality assurance agency for the Irish tertiary sector, to develop shared principles for accreditation and welcomes this ongoing work. USI believes that successful completion of this activity will help to clarify the role of all key stakeholders involved in the professional accreditation process and believes that further consideration of how CORU can engage students as a key educational partner would support successful adherence to these shared principles.

Communication between CORU, students and providers

Under Strategic Priority Three, CORU outlines the importance of effective communication in order to enhance public awareness of its’ role and to communicate its’ value to the professions it regulates. Regarding the latter, USI notes Action Point 3.3 around developing and delivering a communications plan targeted towards students. USI very much welcomes the focus on developing effective communications with students and believes that this is vital to furthering student understanding of the role that CORU plays in their education. In

actioning this, USI would encourage the use of dedicated communications channels between students and CORU representatives, developed in collaboration with students. These examples of what this could look like include

- A dedicated section on the CORU website for students in health & social care professional programmes with clear information on the provisions in place within each subject area.
- A direct point of liaison for students within CORU on any enquiries related to their education.
- Structured means of engagement between CORU and students, in line with the suggestions from the previous section.

USI also recognizes that education providers have an important role to play in supporting the communication between CORU and students on related professional programmes. It is, however, worth acknowledging that at times, these lines of communication are not always clear to all stakeholders which can lead to mixed, or unclear messaging or sometimes, a vacuum of information. USI believes this is best resolved through clear information being provided to all students around the respective roles of providers, and CORU in their education.

Finally, under Strategic Priority One, USI notes the reference to ‘Fitness to Practice’ activities in line with fielding and managing complaints. Clarity on the responsibility for oversight of fitness to practice policies within professional programmes would be very much welcomed – as would consideration of how education providers and CORU can balance their responsibilities to safeguard the public with the need to ensure equality of opportunity to all students, particularly students with disabilities through these procedures. Under Action Point 1.2 to ‘Develop and implement standards for entry to registers’, it would be welcomed if current entry standards could be reviewed and clarified as part of this e.g. students with previous convictions.

Placement and Work-Based Learning

Placement and work-based learning plays a pivotal role in the development of competencies in line with CORU professional standards. As acknowledged in the draft statement of strategy, the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency has changed how health and social care services are delivered in Ireland. This subsequently impacts on the delivery of placement and work-based learning as part of relevant professional programmes of education. It is worth noting that many students have put themselves and their families at risk by completing placement at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as there were no alternative means to satisfy the professional requirements for the programme.

Considering this, it is pivotal that professional standards, and programme requirements are flexible enough to enable education providers to respond to the changing landscape, in collaboration with their students, QQI and of course CORU. For example, where student placements have been disrupted because of the ongoing public health emergency, are there alternative means by which students can satisfy the professional requirements for the programme? Furthermore, in the likely event that COVID-19 has a pipeline effect on

placement opportunities in CORU-regulated professions for years to come, can new and innovative solutions be developed to meet professional placement requirements? These are questions which CORU have no doubt been contemplating over recent months and USI once again reiterates the importance of involving students from relevant professional courses in these discussions.

In reference to the above, USI notes the [‘Joint Statement of Principles for the Higher Education Sector COVID-19 Response’](#) developed by the Australian Higher Education sector, in collaboration with the Australian Council of Professions in May 2020. This statement outlines key points of consideration for professional bodies and HE professionals to consider when responding to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on accredited programmes of education. USI particularly wishes to highlight Sections 1 & 4 on ‘Accreditation Flexibility and maintaining course quality’ and ‘Mitigating a reduced availability of Professional Placements’. The points made in these sections speak to the challenges faced by Higher Education stakeholders in Ireland as a result of the public health emergency, and USI would welcome CORU’s consideration of how they could incorporate these principles into their ongoing collaboration with education providers.

Regarding placement and work-based learning, and in line with some of the points made in the previous section, it would be helpful to clarify the lines of responsibility regarding oversight of professional placement in order to ensure it supports students in the successful development of professional standards whilst also supporting the wellbeing of students during professional placement. It would furthermore be welcomed if clarity could be provided on how students can be supported financially whilst on placement – recognizing the financial barriers that many students may face in completing placement as part of their professional education. Furthermore, where specific trainings are required to be completed in advance of commencing placement, clarification on who is responsible for facilitating students in completing these trainings would be welcomed.

Conclusion

In concluding, USI notes the [Strategic Results](#) as outlined in the draft document, particularly the following points:

- We have progressed a sustainable model of regulation that allows greater agility to respond to changing contexts of practice and service delivery.
- We are seen as being open, transparent and fair in our dealings with the professionals

USI believes that the proposals outlined in this consultation response align well with successful delivery of the above strategic results. In order to be open, transparent and fair, it is crucial that CORU maintains strong links with all educational stakeholders – particularly students as the future of the health and social care professions. Furthermore, greater agility is particularly important considering the ongoing COVID-19 Public Health Emergency and this underlines the need for professional standards, and programme requirements that underpin this agility.

USI would welcome the opportunity to engage with CORU at future stages of the consultation process in the development of the new Statement of Strategy and reiterates the importance of structured and effective means of communication between CORU and students on relevant professional programmes. If you have any questions about this submission, please contact Kevin on education@usi.ie or 086816 5498.