

Vote

CLARE AUSTICK VP FOR WELFARE



ABOUT ME



My name is Clare Austick and I am delighted to be running for the position of Vice President for Welfare on the Union of Students in Ireland Executive Team. I'm from Galway and studied Science here. I've been involved in the student movement for a number of years; as a class representative twice, a part-time Equality Officer, the Vice President for Welfare & Equality last year and the current President of NUI Galway Students' Union.

I have seen how the student movement continually evolves and adapts in order to implement meaningful change to improve the student experience. The role of the Vice President for Welfare is an incredibly important one, both on a national and local level. The Vice President for Welfare is about supporting students by running awareness campaigns and themed weeks, representing the student voice on national committees and lobbying for better support structures, while also providing guidance and assistance to local unions and welfare officers in the work that they do to ensure you get the best welfare support possible.

Reflecting on the many roles I have held and looking back on my journey in the student movement during the process of writing this manifesto, has confirmed my desire to help others and want to make a positive contribution to society. In order for us to improve our ways of doing things in the welfare remit, we need to change the negative mindsets and attitudes people hold around mental health, consent, substance use and misuse, and other relevant issues. We need to be mindful of the daily interactions, relationships, challenges and individual circumstances students experience to truly understand the complexities of holistic wellbeing.

As USI is the national representative body I want to ensure your input and engagement contributes to the advancement of the welfare agenda. Following lengthy conversations with fellow officers on how they view the role of the Vice President for Welfare, I have drawn up the following manifesto. I would like to hear your thoughts and ideas on the direction and priorities for the Vice President for Welfare to ensure you feel part of your national union and that you help shape the welfare agenda that impacts so positively on so many students.

I fully understand the many and challenging issues encountered by students on a daily basis. I believe the student movement can be a powerful force for meaningful change. I care deeply about your wellbeing and I will ensure that your best interests are at the core of everything we do.

Warm regards,
Clare

ACCOMMODATION

- Lobby for capital grants to be provided to institutions so they can build affordable purpose-built student accommodation.
- Campaign for a rent freeze on student accommodation and improving the rent cap legislation to ensure they are seen as a limit and not a target.
- Lobby for improved digs legislation to ensure all students have housing rights.
- Establish an emergency accommodation scheme that has rooms set aside in each institution in the case of evictions. Lobby for an accommodation fund to be made available for those students who cannot pay their rents.
- In collaboration with the RTB and Threshold, provide a comprehensive accommodation guide on tenant rights for students.

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

- Lobby for SUSI reform to accurately reflect the cost of living, reverse the decision taken to decrease the qualifying criteria for the non-adjacent rate and restore the full postgraduate grant.
- Lobby for the increase in the financial support allocated to the Student Assistance Fund and reform around HEA guidelines.
- Lobby for the introduction of an international student support fund.
- Assist unions in establishing food banks and clothes swap initiatives to support students who are struggling financially.
- Push for the reform of the Back to Education Allowance.

CONSENT & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- Support SU's in lobbying their institutions in developing and implementing sustainable consent workshops and active bystander intervention programmes.
- Implement the findings of the Sexual Experiences Survey and use it as a lobbying tool for increased funding and supports.
- Assist in implementing policies on a local level around sexual harassment and violence.
- Run an awareness campaign around gender-based violence and abusive relationships.
- Improve the reporting structures of sexual assault in institutions and establish points of contacts in each institution.
- Develop an ongoing support strategy for survivors of sexual violence.

MENTAL HEALTH

- Ensure the €2 million set aside for student mental health and wellbeing initiatives in the Finance Bill 2019 are earmarked for Counselling Services on campus. Additionally, I will lobby for an annual investment for sustainable core funding for student mental health services as opposed to once off commitments.
- Build on the Connecting Minds conference to hold an annual event around wellbeing to allow for networking and collaboration opportunities.
- Commit to ongoing year-long welfare campaigns decided by the Welfare Working Group.
- Coordinate localized days of actions that have a national impact.
- Highlight national awareness days such as; World Mental Health Day, Men's Mental Health Day, Suicide Prevention Day and provide resource packs to unions to support these campaigns.
- Review this year's Mental Health Survey to implement the findings.
- Organise ASIST and SafeTalk training and extend to part-time officers, class reps and students who are interested in attending.
- I will identify the areas of support needed and look into modernising services to increase the amount of students helped at a given time (i.e online counselling, support groups, group therapy and individual sessions).
- Review the positive impact of the Peer Assisted Learning Initiative ran in TUDSU with a view to rolling it out in other institutions across the country.
- Lobby for postgraduate student supports including access to existing ones on campus and creating a financial fund.
- Put more of a focus on all aspects of mental health in all the welfare campaigns including sections on body positivity, disordered eating, the impact of social media, bullying and cyber-bullying, revenge pornography and de-stress campaigns.



SEXUAL HEALTH

- Lobby for on campus sexual health care facilities such as STI clinics and rapid HIV testing.
- Make contraception available free of charge. Build on the National Condom Distribution Service which was implemented this year and ensure all campuses can avail of the NCDS. Lobby for the pill and sanitary products to be made free for students on campus.
- Increased information and accessibility of PrEP and PEP. Lobby for the removal of the MSM blood ban.
- Provide accessible information on unplanned pregnancies, available supports and options and abortion information provided by HSE My Options.
- Improve information and supports available for pregnant students around deferrals, alternate exam venues, mental health supports, leave of absence policies, assignments and financial supports.
- Build on and strengthen the reach of the existing U=U campaign.
- Lobby for inclusive sex education reform.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Lobby for health care facilities to be made available on campus such as GPs and physiotherapists.
- Highlight the importance of physical health and how it intersects with mental and sexual health by running a campaign on a holistic approach to wellbeing with an emphasis on healthy eating, sleep and routine, exercise, mind, body and soul in collaboration with Healthy Ireland.
- Implement a Safety Walking Home initiative where students are encouraged to walk home with their friends and check in with one another after a night out.
- Work with Institutions, MO's and Healthy Campus Initiatives to roll out smoke free campuses and smoking cessation programmes.

DRUGS & ALCOHOL AWARENESS

- Run a drug and alcohol awareness campaign with a particular focus on study drugs, festival seasons, recreational usage, mixing and harm reduction.
- Use the MiUse survey findings to inform policies and campaigns ran.
- Work with relevant organisations to run an awareness campaign around the effects of gambling.
- Lobby for drug decriminalization legislation and the implementation of a harm reduction strategy with REACT, Drugs.ie and the National Drugs Strategy HSE.
- Run a celebration campaign around recovery and the positives of overcoming addiction.

ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORTING WELFARE OFFICERS

- Regular communication and updates through phone calls, Skype and messages. Arrange check-ins with local unions and welfare officers before any major event/ campaign/ themed week and schedule debriefing sessions after.
- Keep informed and updated about specific needs of unions and provide advice, guidance and support.
- Provide guidance and assistance in policy implementation around sexual harassment and violence, consent, alcohol and drugs, social media and cyber bullying and any other areas that need addressing in local unions.
- Increase the amount of campus visits to support local campaigns and themed weeks instead of having the main engagement through roadshows.
- Increase the amount of training provided in areas such as consent, disclosure training, mental health first aid, SUSI, housing legislation and accommodation rights, dealing with casework, coordinating campaigns and themed weeks, disability awareness, inclusive language, unconscious bias training and unplanned pregnancies.
- Build on networking opportunities with relevant student societies, other unions and NGO's.
- Provide resource packs on themed weeks and campaigns, improve the networking of welfare officers for information-sharing and decision-making on a national level.
- Regular video updates for students to see the work of the national union in the welfare remit.



TRAINING RECEIVED

- Mental Health First Aid
- Disclosure Training in the aftermath of sexual assault and violence with the DRCC
- Supporting students with disabilities provided by AHEAD
- Students in Distress Training
- Mental Health Reform Media Training
- How to run an effective Mental health campaign with Please Talk
- Smart Consent
- Students' Union Training and Students' Union Training+
- USI part-time officer training

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Led the 'Invest in Us' protest on World Mental Health Day and secured an additional €5000 for the Counselling Service.
- Initiated the implementation of the first ever consent workshops on campus in student accommodation residences with the NUI Galway Smart Consent team. We trained over 500 first year students in consent in year 1.
- Brought forward the idea and secured €50 000 from the University to provide a 'Library Laptop Loan Scheme' for students who cannot afford their own laptops or cannot avail of one on campus.
- Secured University-funded transportation to satellite exam venues instead of students having to pay.
- A founding member of the University of Sanctuary campaign who pushed for NUI Galway to be designated a University of Sanctuary which we achieved in December 2019.
- Secured €27 000 for 3000 Keep Cups which were distributed across campus.
- Started Mental Health Mondays on campus in collaboration with Please Talk and GMIT Students' Union addressing the interconnecting aspects of wellbeing: mental health supports, transitioning through different stages in your life, drug and alcohol awareness, consent, sleep and routine, building a support network, body and soul, disability, gender and sexuality.
- Won Activist of the Year in the Student Achievement Awards Ireland 2019.
- Was nominated for 'Student Leader of the Year' and for 'Outstanding Mental Health Activism' in the Student Achievement Awards Ireland 2019.
- Won Part-Time Officer of the Year in the Student Achievement Awards Ireland 2018.
- Partnered with the One Galway Movement of trade unions and chaired the General Election Hustings 2020 with 11 candidates.
- Was elected on to USI's Campaigns Strategy Committee and planned national campaigns.
- Was elected on to USI's Finance Committee overseeing the finances for the year.
- Represented USI at the European Students' Union Convention in Vienna.
- Was involved in the 'SolidariTea' campaign addressing gender inequality and the gender pay gap.
- Attended the European Youth Event in the European Parliament in Strasbourg addressing young people's issues.
- Media experience: radio interviews, newspaper and online article interviews, quotes, comments, statements and TV appearances.

