



***A manifesto for a united movement***

Forógra do Ghluaiseacht Aontaithe

# Hiya! Dia daoibh!

Hello! I hope this manifesto finds you well. It has been a privilege and the most incredible of times to work with and for the students of the Dublin Region as VP Dublin, and I would be honoured to be given the opportunity to serve as VP Campaigns. A position, throughout my time in this movement, I have seen has the capacity to do great levels of good. We are in the midst of chartering some of the most uncharted waters, with the risk to education and to justice within our society graver now, than ever before. We need a movement now more than ever, one that can adapt in these socially distant times but one that is most certainly heard and respected. The demands for change that have been heard on the streets loudly, and in the quiet revolution of the ballot boxes earlier this year have not gone away because of the pandemic. We still have the highest fees in Europe, a funding crisis in higher education, we are still failing to meet our climate actions goals, Direct provision continues to violate human rights, student housing rent increases may have stalled but the costs are still way too high; some of the highest in Europe. Dodgy landlords, a crisis in mental health funding, a flawed grant system still suffering from the brunt of austerity, the list goes on. We are still living in a dystopian hangover of the 2008 financial crisis. Across this island, across this country, we deserve better and it is up to us now to ensure those that come after us get that.



# My experience

- Served as president of the Irish Second-Level Students' Union in which I prioritised access to education as a major issue.
- Addressed Oireachtas committee on Education and Skills in December 2014.
- Spoke at the 2014 USI #EducationIs Demonstration and 2015 USI Congress.
- Represented second-level students in multiple OBESSU meetings and helped in the organising of some international events.
- 2/3rds of a degree from Dublin City University in Economics, Politics and Law (currently on a sabbatical leave)
- Served as Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty rep and VP Education and Placement in DCUSU in 2017 and 2018 respectively.
- Played a lead role in the #ShanowenShakedown campaign of 2018 in the fight for rent caps for PBSA and engaged in direct action as part of Take Back the city
- Campaigned for Gaeltacht grants to be re-instated during my time as VP within DCUSU.
- Campaigned for affordable student accommodation during my time as VP within DCUSU and organised a number of actions including one in Summer 2018 which received national press coverage.
- Co-Ordinated the DCUSU efforts within Raise The Roof, Fund the Future , Stand With Nurses and many other campaigns during my time as VP.
- Attended an ESU event in 2019.
- Sat on USI Campaigns Strategy Committee 2018-19 and USI Coiste Culturtha 2018-19.
- Served as USI VP Dublin Region 2019-20 and in this position have worked closely alongside VP Campaigns to campaign on the housing crisis. I have attended numerous Raise The Roof and National Housing and homelessness coalitions meetings and sat on a number of working groups within these groups.
- Worked alongside USI VP Campaigns and VP Welfare to develop the USI Student accommodation position paper.
- Attended dozens of demonstrations on Housing, education, Climate action, reproductive rights, workers rights and LGBT rights.
- Coordinator of the USI Entertainments, Marketing and Commercial activity Committee and policy for 2019-20



USI #EducationIs demo, October 2014

## Who am I?

My name is Craig McHugh, I'm 23 years old. I'm originally from Co. Louth, though I've lived in Dublin for the last 4 years . I'm an activist, a feminist, a socialist and most of all someone who cares very strongly about our movement and the strength of unity.

*Craig McHugh*





## Communications plan:

- Work with the USI president, General Manager and PR manager to develop a new plan for communications focused on elevating our position in public discourse on major issues. We need to be more vocal and more frequent in our communication. We should explore expanding our spending on social media to target specific demographics for specific campaigns.
- Work to develop the work done on USI Instagram TV
- Work with LU Gaeilge to ensure the Irish language is used throughout all our campaigns.
- Expand our use of the USI website to provide more content to our members such as video advice and pre-recorded seminars.
  - Work with the USI exec team to explore the potential of a USI podcast
  - Expand the reach of USI social media and the platforms we use such as TikTok.
  - Focus on new, professional video campaigns to promote our work and grow public support and attention to our causes.
  - Make our communications more accessible, by adding subtitles to videos and making audio version of documents on our website.

## Trainings for officers and activists

- Consult regularly with student activists and students' unions to understand the training needs of groups and meet them.
- Provide full direct-action training for SU officers and activists to ensure we have a movement that is ready, when we need to mobilise.







## Strategy

### Grass roots work:

Work alongside the Regional VPs to enhance the relationship between activists on the ground, students' unions and USI as a whole making for a democratized movement.

**Sit down and talk. Then get loud. Direct Action yields results. E.g 2018 and 2020 rent protests.**

- It's important to know what we're talking about and to also make sure we're talking, USI has been good at getting this balance right in recent times. I think we can step up things a gear though, when talking isn't working – our actions need to be strong and loud. They need to be widespread though. I'll make sure we have the research and the resources to back up our arguments in meetings, committee rooms, Oireachtas rooms, reports, press releases, campaign videos, literature, and on the ground. It's important to do the homework.

- **Lobbying:** I will increase the amount of lobbying USI does. It's essential in the first year of a new government that they are held to account on the issues that affect students most.





# Working together as a national union, north and south.

*For anyone who knows me, or who caught me at SUT+ last year, you'll know I love the north and that I prefer Northern Tayto to Southern Tayto.*

- Work with the NUS-USI president and team, to develop a plan for how we can ensure our national movement is national.
- Work closely with students' unions in the north, and at the invitation of the NUS-USI president; *work occasionally from the NUS-USI offices in Belfast.*
- Share ideas and collaborate much more with the NUS-USI team to ensure our campaigns both north and south can benefit from shared ideas and collaboration.
- Work alongside the LU Gaeilge to fight for Irish language rights and signage in the North.
- Overall, improve the links between activists across the nation.





## **Ladder of participation**

Adapt our approach to campaigning on local and national issues by introducing a ladder of participation approach to make sure everyone can play their role. Not everyone has the time to attend protests or make signs but if we make sure our campaigns are accessible for everyone, we can broaden the level of engagement and participation we have with them.

## **The pandemic year**

- Think creatively and try new things to ensure the key objectives of campaigns are met despite social distancing, remote working etc. remaining in place or being reintroduced during the pandemic.
- Push for a just process through the pandemic that ensures students rights and welfare are vindicated throughout.

## **Demonstration regularity.**

- Increase (to the extent on which it is possible to respect COVID-19 measures) our presence on the ground, while great work has been done in the background and in lobbying – we must increase how often we demonstrate publicly
- Move away from the orthodox “one big march” approach that we have pursued for years, in accordance with the wishes of USI campaigns strategy committee.

## **The USI podcast.**

Work with MOs, students and the USI exec team to develop a new USI podcast aimed at discussing the major issues faced by students



# Education as a public good

The commodification of education and the lack of political ambition to tackle a solution to our major funding crisis needs to end, now.

**Enough is enough. Education is a public good,** as VP Campaigns *I will prioritise this issue as the central theme of all we do.* Education as a public good must mean at the bare minimum, that people can **access** a system that is **funded** adequately via the exchequer, is accessible and that they are **supported** through this period with the right level of and quality supports.

**System Funding:** The system needed an annual injection of 600m from 2016-2021 according to the Cassels report just to survive, and without it now the system finds itself in a disaster like zone. Furthermore, due to the drop off in international students which Irish institutions have used as a “pothole filler” of sorts for the last number of years, the sector will be under even bigger pressures as we progress through this period. With this, an emergency funding package needs to be allocated to public institutions so they can survive. More funding, means less commodification. More commodification means higher student rents, poor services, falling standards and precarious work conditions.

**Access:** While the introduction of free education in the 1990s has done great things for the Irish economy and society and risen our participation rates in the long run; the latest figures show us that’s not the full picture. Single parents, members of the traveller community and people from lower socioeconomic economic backgrounds are consistently not entering higher education. This needs to be addressed. There is now fair recovery in higher education unless we have a systemic change which ensures equity of access. I will work with the executive team, the Irish second-level students union and other stakeholders to begin a conversation on how we can seriously change the social and economic factors that play such a pivotal role in why some people cannot get to Higher education. *We need to eradicate the student contribution charge, the ultimate barrier to access*

**Support:** SUSI grants, HEAR schemes, DARE schemes, Access grants and much more have all suffered from the brunt of austerity cutbacks. As well as this, support and the provision of services such as counselling on campuses is nowhere near adequate levels. Students should be supported through their education, if they are not, our system is failing.

# Student Accommodation & Housing



The housing crisis has hit students hard. Some are homeless, some have been victims to cowboy landlords, cracks in the system, exorbitant rents. It must stop. From my experience leading campaigns such as Shanowen Shakedown, and in my time as a sabbat, I've gotten to grips with what needs to be addressed and how it can be done.

## Arguing the case for Public Builds:

The National student accommodation strategy is meeting its targets, but at what cost? The average rent for PBSA single beds in Dublin is €9100 , and in Galway and in Cork is around €6800. The over reliance on the private market has meant major capital has profiteered off the backs of students in the midst of a housing crisis. These builds are glorified hotels equipped with shiny additions that most students do not need. As set out, in the USI Student Accommodation position paper that I co-wrote alongside the VP Welfare and VP Campaigns, we need to change course and move to a public build-based system.

Providing HEIs with capital grants to build student accommodation will ramp up supply and help stabilize prices and bring them down to affordable rates. While private providers serve profit, institutions are at least somewhat accountable to their students and the public.

*Investment in PBSA can also act as a major assistance to economic growth and help ease the pressure on the private rental market which has pushed many families into homelessness.*

## The Student side of the Housing Crisis:

We cannot have direct provision students sleeping in the airport or on the streets, students couch surfing for weeks on end, students living in rooms with up to 10 people, students living in their cars or wondering up to the SU asking where the best place would be to pitch a tent. It's a stain on our society that our housing crisis has gotten so bad. As a member of Raise the roof, the National Housing and Homeless Coalition and as a student leader I will demand the change that is so badly needed to make sure such a crisis is not the faith of our country every few years.

Students' Unions, Activists and political youth wings have done incredible work on this issue and more over the last number of years. I will change our tact and allow for more work and feed in from wider groups through new USI think ins. Working somewhat off the work done by NUS-USI.



# No to dodgy landlords and nasty legal loopholes.

A dedicated campaign, online and on the ground via lobbying, demonstrations and direct action to end the legal situation around the B&B set up in digs accommodation.

*Student tenants deserve rights.*



## Demand a better future

- I will campaign for a number of reforms to the Department of Housing including a Site Value Tax to replace our current property tax which collected less than €500m in the republic of Ireland, despite housing prices being at an all time high.  
*A case must be made for addressing our country's serious obsession with land speculation and land hoarding.*

- Work with tenants' rights groups and housing campaign groups across the country to link the student housing crisis with the bigger picture. It's all the one struggle let's work together!







## Direct Provision:

- We cannot go on with this system, the Magdalene laundries of the 21st century. It is inhumane and it must be put to a stop.
- Ramp up and recharge the USI campaign to End Direct Provision alongside the VP Equality and Citizenship by working with migrants, people with experience of DP, SUs, activists, campaign groups and NGOs to build a broad coalition to end this.
- Lobby for and campaign for legal protection to be provided for students in sanctuary courses. Deportation orders are wrong and are extremely disruptive to the pursuit of one's education.
- Highlight to students through a visual and informative campaign the reality of life in direct provision to garner attention and widespread support for a lobbying campaign to the new government. We need to wake society up to this horrid injustice that is a stain on Irish society. We do not live in a republic as long as this remains.

## Health:

- Work alongside the VP Welfare to campaign for better mental, physical and sexual health provisions across the island, north and south.



## Climate Action and Sustainability

*Without a sustainable planet and society, what's the point of all we're doing?*

- If passed, work off and execute the USI Sustainability policy alongside the Exec Team.
- Campaign for public transport investment as part of the solution to our economic crisis as well as our climate crisis.
- Work with activists and the current coalitions, to increase the role USI plays in the most important issue of our lifetimes.
- Work with organisations such as Fairtrade to campaign for a more just economy.



## Brexit:

*As a resident of the border region, I know how significant a threat Brexit is to our society across this island and the issues it throws up to our student movement.*



- Work with the USI executive team to continue to execute the mandate of the USI Brexit Position Paper, in line with the USI bilateral and trilateral agreements. I worked alongside the VP Academic Affairs this year on this issue.

- Continue to support NUS-USI in their No to No Deal campaign and respective students' unions in their campaigns on the issue of Brexit.

- From August 2020, begin a review of the USI Brexit position paper, to ensure that it is reflective of the current issues facing students across the island with an emphasis on engagement with students in the north.

# A big NO to Austerity. A big Yes to a new vision for our society.

Propose a motion at the first national council of 2020/21 to outline USI's opposition to any attempt by the Irish government to impose austerity as a measure for dealing with the economic crisis; and in our actions and words push for a fair recovery that does not mirror the measures taken through the last national economic crisis which crippled education and destroyed many lives. If this is passed:

- Present a vision for a “student friendly recovery” to government which prioritises education and views as a public good but is also presented as a potential tool that the government can use to kickstart our economy.
- Oppose austerity and stand with other movements to fight against it.
- Work with activists and academics to voice an alternative to austerity and outline the disastrous impact it would have on society and on the later lives of the students we represent today.



**Thank you** for taking the time to read through my plans.

While I haven't been able to lay out my plans on everything, know I will work my hardest to ensure our campaigns are effective.

The USI policy manual is a very big document, so getting all the issues down on paper here just wasn't possible.

If you would like to chat to me about anything, that is in this or isn't please don't hesitate to get in touch :

craig.mchugh32@mail.dcu.ie and check out [www.facebook.com/craigforusi](https://www.facebook.com/craigforusi) for more content.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig McHugh". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping 'C' and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.