



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn



MARIE LYONS

Vice President for
Equality and Citizenship



Hello!

My name is Marie Lyons and I am running to be your next Vice President for Equality and Citizenship. I have spent this year as the Vice President for the Border, Midlands and Western region for the Union of Students in Ireland and it would be an honour to be elected to part of the USI Executive team for one more year.



A little about me...

I have been involved in the student movement for a number of years and began my journey in St. Angela's College, Sligo Students' Union where I was elected first as the Vice President for Welfare and Equality during my final year studying a B.Ed. in Home Economics and Economics. I later went on to become the President of the Students' Union. I am the current Vice President for the Border, Midlands and Western region and have truly enjoyed every second of my experience.

This role has allowed me to be present on campus across the eight Colleges in the BMW, LYIT, St. Angela's College, IT Sligo, GMIT, NUI Galway, AIT, Maynooth University and DkIT and engage with the fantastic students and officers in the region. Within the regional role it allowed me to work on a number of areas and support students and officers on the ground. I have always had a passion for education and particularly access into education which led me to pursue a career in teaching.



How has my current role shaped my ideas for the position of Vice President for Equality and Citizenship?

Communication

This year I gained a great insight into the issues facing students in USI by supporting Students' Union events and campaigns, rolling out USI campaigns across campuses and presenting to Class Representative Councils; I saw the importance of good communication with students and officers to ensure their voice was heard at a national level.

Last year, I ran on a platform of increased communication and this year it was one of my main aims. I would like to continue this if elected as Vice President for Equality and Citizenship through greater use of online platforms and our social media to ensure we are reaching the 374,000 members we represent.



Presence

This year I spent my time on campuses engaging with students and supporting officers, I aimed to ensure as many students were aware of USIs activities across all campuses. I made a conscious effort to aim to reach out and update students on all campuses of their national union. I want to continue this by reaching out to meet societies and students and ensure students are aware of their national union and how we are supporting and fighting for you. I also want to support officers where possible in the lead up to their events and campaigns and continue to be accessible to support and help officers and students.

Providing a voice

A large amount of USIs work is in ensuring the student voice is at the heart of all discussions and decisions. Therefore, if elected I want to ensure your voice is heard within your national union. I want to achieve this by including the work which students are undertaking and issues they are facing and provide a platform for these achievements and issues to be heard. I would like to see the creation of a USI podcast where issues facing students and the work of USI is propelled and heard. I also want to work with the USI executive team and staff to ensure the issues of students are at the forefront of media and discussion where possible.

Access to Education

Making education accessible to all is a passion of mine and has led me to where I am today, I want to continue to fight for greater inclusion and access for all through highlighting issues fighting for a student voice in all discussions. Education should be accessible for all and I will continue USIs fight to ensure education is a right, not a privilege.

Accessibility

This year I had the privilege to organise the 'Power of Disability Conference' with the Vice President for Equality and Citizenship. In the organisation of this event I had the opportunity to speak with students and organisations fighting for the needs of students with additional needs. I want to work with the USI executive team and staff to make our events, campaigns and online content as accessible as possible.

Further Education

As a regional officer this year I worked to support Further Education Colleges to become members of USI and if elected to the position of Equality and Citizenship I will support our Further Education members in rolling out campaigns and events and encouraging them to engage in USI events, campaigns and trainings.



Covid-19

With the current restrictions to ensure the safety and health of our country this also brings some immense challenges for the students in Ireland in the coming year. With this uncertainty I will work to fight to prevent additional barriers to accessing education and support those struggling to remain in education due to COVID-19.

I will continue the great work being undertaken by the Vice President for Equality and Citizenship and the USI executive team in working with the departmental working group and external groups to support access and inclusion within the education system despite the current pandemic. I want to work to ensure that USI events and trainings including Pink Training, Women Lead, EMpower, Mature Students' Conference and the Students with Disabilities Conference continue despite COVID-19 as these events are fundamental in the work that we do as an organisation to empower our members.



Reproductive rights

In repealing the eight amendment, abortion services have become available in Ireland but not in all counties. I want to lobby to ensure this is the case and that people can have access to abortion services across the island.

I also want to lobby for the recommendations from the Report of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution to be enacted including universal access to contraception and reformed sex education for our schools.

I want to work collaboratively with NUS-USI in supporting their work with reproductive rights.



Trans healthcare

I want to work with student groups and lobby for increased access to healthcare for transgender people and also the implementation of an informed consent model for healthcare for the transgender community.

I want to also continue the support of the lobbying efforts done so far by the 'This is me' Trans healthcare movement and lobbying for appropriate and well funded trans healthcare to be provided in Ireland.

Gender Recognition

This year the Vice President for Equality and Citizenship along with support from sabbatical officers developed a gender identity campaign and developed a support booklet for unions.

- I want to continue this and work on a campaign to provide information for students.
- I want to work in response to the Report on the Review of the Gender Recognition Act, which USI welcomed. Although, there are a number of key areas that were not outlined in the report and need to be addressed.

PrEP

With the success of the U=U campaign I will lobby to extend the service capacity of the PrEP programme to allow for greater uptake of the programme along with providing information to students on the programme.

MSM Blood donation

Although the introduction of the reduced amount of time for men who have sex with men who have to wait after sexual activity to give blood is welcomed in NI, we still need to do more to remove the ban completely across the island. This discriminatory ban cannot continue



LGBTQ+ students

USI throughout the history of the organisation has supported LGBTQ+ students, but we still have so much more to achieve! Therefore, if elected I will build on Pink Training to continue to grow this fantastic event. I also want to support Students' Unions further prior and after the training event and help with the development of their own campaigns and events on campuses. I want to improve communication between LGBTQ+ societies and therefore want to develop an online platform for LGBTQ+ societies to help develop links and also provide support to interested students in smaller unions to establish their own societies.

Ethnic Minorities

I want to ensure students have a space to come together and feel empowered to run for leadership positions and strive for more from your national union, your College and your Government.

This year USI held our first EMpower event, I want to continue to develop this event and provide a platform for students from ethnic minorities to highlight the issues they face.

- I want to work with the European Network Against Racism to lobby for the introduction of hate crime legislation.
- While also lobbying to change the 27th amendment to give children born in Ireland the right to Irish citizenship.



Direct Provision

Throughout this year Students' Unions across the country are battling to protect the rights of those who are within Ireland's cruel and unjust direct provision system.

- I want to work with students in direct provision, Students' Unions and representative organisations to prevent students within the University of Sanctuary schemes and those in the education system from receiving deportation orders.
- I want to continue the work done this year to develop the Sanctuary Students Coalition.
- I want to work together as a student movement to fight for the removal of the current direct provision system and support and care for our asylum seekers with dignity..

Students with Disabilities

This year I had the pleasure to be the lead organiser for the Power of Disability forum, this year's conference had a strong focus on empowerment and was student led throughout the event.

- I want to make sure USI becomes as accessible for all and support Students' Unions in making their events and campaigns accessible to their students.
- I want to continue the work which has been done in the past year with AHEAD and the Disability Federation of Ireland to support students and provide awareness of the issues students with disabilities face.
- I want to provide support documents and training for SUs to run inclusive events and campaigns.
- I want to support sabbatical officers lobbying efforts to make your College accessible to all through developing the accessibility audit template established this year and work with DFI and AHEAD in supporting the roll out of these on campuses.
- I want to work to make Universal Design for Learning a reality across all institutions.
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Mature Students

I believe we never truly stop learning and with the number of mature students returning to education this emphasises this. Mature students have additional needs and may not often make contact with the national union to express their issues.

- I want to work with mature student officers to support them in the events and work with unions to develop mature student officer roles within their unions.
- I want to work with Mature Students Ireland to lobby for increased supports for mature students on campuses.
- I want to ensure mature students feel comfortable within their national union by developing an online platform for mature students to engage with USI and establish relationships with other mature students across the island.
- I want to work on the issues brought forward from the attendees at the mature students conference and develop regular online/regionally based networking days for mature students.



Traveller students

At present the number of students from the traveller community accessing higher education is far too low.

- I want to provide a platform for students from the travelling community to encourage more students from the traveller community into higher education through celebrating International Traveller and Roma Day and creating a network of students from the Traveller and Roma community to support one another throughout the experience in higher education.
- I want to work with Pavee Point and other external organisations supporting traveller students to highlight the issues facing students from the traveller community.

International Students

Large numbers of international students come to Irish institutions yet are faced with a number of barriers and with COVID-19 the barriers facing international students has further increased.

- I want to work with international students and the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) to lobby the Department of Justice to reform the process for visas for international students which is currently very difficult.
- I want to support international students throughout the current pandemic to ensure they are supported and their issues are highlighted and not forgotten during COVID-19 discussions.



Sustainability and Climate Action

Young people are leading the movement for climate action and I want to commend the amazing work being done by students and Students' Unions across the country in making students and Colleges more aware of the imminent impact of climate change and addressing issues within their own Colleges.

- Continue the work which USI has done on sustainability and continue to strive for more from our Government and our Colleges and lead the roll out of the new USI Climate Action Policy which I worked upon this year. This USI Climate Action policy will form the basis of all our lobbying efforts in the future and I will continue to lobby and campaign to ensure that our Government steps up and takes Climate Action seriously.
- I will provide training for SU officers in developing and implementing environmental policies on campus.
- I want to support students in making sustainability one of the main priorities for Colleges and students and support Green and Environmental societies on campus.

Voter Registration

Throughout this year Students' Unions have supported USIs #GenerationVote campaign to ensure all students could register to vote for local, national and European elections.

- I want to continue with this campaign and ensure all students have the chance to register to vote.
- I want to develop a campaign on the value of exercising your democratic right to vote.
- I also want to continue to lobby for USIs policy on voter registration reform.

Seanad Éireann

Reform With another Seanad Éireann election passed we are still no closer to an inclusive Seanad voting system, this system needs drastic reform.

- I want to lobby to extend the voting rights for Seanad Éireann elections to all through lobbying for Seanad reform and working on the recommendations from the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform (The Manning Report).

Go raibh maith agaibh!

for taking the time to read my manifesto and I would be delighted to hear from you!

Please feel free to reach out to me through:

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Vote Marie Lyons for USI
VP Equality and Citizenship