**Congress Clár Annual Report Template**

Marie Lyons

Vice President for Equality and Citizenship

It has been an honor and pleasure to represent students from across the island as the Vice President for Equality and Citizenship this year. I have given my all this year to ensure students from underrepresented and those who faced the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic in as far as possible did not experience educational disadvantage as a result. I have had the privilege to work alongside and hear from some incredible student leaders and Students’ Unions and a particular thanks to the members of the student advisory groups and members of the Equality and Citizenship WG for your support and guidance throughout this year. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the next VP E&C the best of luck in this incredible role!

### Campaigns

*Migrant Minds Matter*

Throughout this year USI worked alongside MASI and STAND to develop a campaign to highlight the issues and barriers facing students and perspective students gaining access to Higher Education. This campaign focused on a petition to Min. Simon Harris and Min. Roderic O’Gorman, a pledge for students and individuals and the selling of merchandise to support an educational fund within MASI.

*Black History Month*

USI ran an educational campaign to celebrate Black History month which provided readings and educational documentaries and concluded with a panel discussion with student leaders. Throughout this year the increase of racist attacks and the rise of the far right has highlighted the importance of celebrating and highlighting black history.

*Decolonise the Degree*

USI are delighted to have begun work alongside STAND on decolonising education in Ireland. This work is ongoing, and we look forward to important work continuing this towards the end of this year.

### Events

As a result of COVID-19, we had to make the choice to move all our Equality events to online means. Although, with the move online we were delighted to increase capacity for Pink Training, The Power of Disability, Women Lead, the Mature Students’ Seminar and EMpower and open the events up to more students than ever before. We were delighted to work with a number of incredible organisations in developing these events including AHEAD, Mature Students Ireland, the Irish Network Against Racism, Black and Irish, ICOS and the HEA to ensure these events were a success. I would like to thank each attendee of our events for your support and we hope you are empowered to put yourself forward for positions of leadership within your Colleges and communities.

### Access and Participation

A large amount of my work has been around supporting access initiatives and highlighting issues with the current systems and routes. In my role I highlighted the barriers to education for migrant, asylum seekers and those who are undocumented and lobbied to have these barriers addressed through the HEAR review and work on the National Access Plan steering group. Supporting Traveller and Roma participation within Higher Education was an area of focus and I worked alongside Traveller and Roma representative organisations to highlight issues faced by these students. We welcomed the announcement of funding support for Traveller students, but we need to continue to support Traveller and Roma participation and progression within Higher Education.

### Citizenship

*Sustainability*
Throughout this year I was delighted to work the sustainability team in USI (the VP BMW, VP Dublin and myself) in coordinating USIs work on sustainability and engaging with climate action organisations and groups. We also rolled out a number of sustainability campaigns including a campaign on the ABCs of the SDGs, fast fashion and plastic reduction and established a climate action group which will support the development of USIs work and ensure students are at the centre of the climate action in Ireland.

*Voter Registration*
Throughout this year we have supported Students’ Unions in rolling our voter registration campaigns and highlighted the active role students play in our democratic processes.

### Supporting Student Concerns

Given the current pandemic many issues arose for several students particularly students with disabilities, international students, mature students and parents and carers and Roma and Traveller students. Several issues arose for these students and we worked to mitigate any educational disadvantage as a result of COVID-19. I sat on several committees addressing these issues and ensuring supports were made available for students lobbying the HEA, the Department of Higher and Further Education, Research Innovation and Science and other stakeholders.

We were delighted to welcome increased SAF funding, financial support to address the digital divide and connectivity issues and additional funding supports for students with disabilities and initiatives on campus. Although welcomed, many issues arose for these students that progressed throughout the pandemic including issues around immigration for international students and issues for students with disabilities in the move to online teaching, learning and assessment.

*Student Advisory groups*

I was delighted to work to develop a number of student advisory groups which led the direction of my work this year and support ensuring issues for a number of students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds were heard during the COVID-19 pandemic. A massive thanks to the members of each of these advisory groups for your support and direction this year.

### Training

Supporting students and Students’ Union officers develop their understanding of issues facing the diverse student population across our island and how to represent the diversity within our College community is vitally important. Throughout this year supporting the roll out of disability awareness training, understanding Universal Design for Learning and anti-racism training were areas of focus throughout the year. I also supported Students’ Unions and Clubs and Societies in developing and rolling out their own training within their institutions.

*NStEP Representing Diversity training*

I was delighted to support the NStEP team in developing this training event which is currently being rolled out in Colleges, a massive congrats to the NStEP team in particular the NStEP Equality, Diversity and Inclusion intern for all her work in developing this important training programme for Class Representatives.