**Ellen Fearon**

***NUS-USI President***

It’s been an absolute privilege being NUS-USI President this year, and I’m looking forward to another year ahead. I am so proud and honoured to get to work with such phenomenal Unions and Officers across the north, as well as an extraordinary USI Exec team. Thank you for everything! Together, we make up a very powerful movement.

**Students Deserve Better**

Priority campaign this year has been ‘Students Deserve Better’ which presents a range of demands for government and institutions to support students in response to the issues students have faced during Covid-19. I can’t give full credit to the work of the NUS-USI team and our Unions in this report, below are a few key highlights of actions and wins from this campaign:

* Formed Students Deserve Better Action Group for students and officers to join and organise weekly around the main campaign asks
* Carried out extensive media coverage for the campaign
* Held a Day of Action and townhall meeting in November with student speakers and politicians from across the north to progress campaign aims
* Created a Students Deserve Better Politicians Pledge which 85 politicians from across the north signed up to including councillors, MLAs and MPs
* Following months of direct lobbying, received direct government guidance for students and a guarantee that students would be able to travel home for Christmas
* Organised a letter to OFMDM and DfE which was signed by 55 student officers in the north
* Collectively won £40 million in funding from Executive – including £500 Covid Disruption Payments for full time higher education students and £8.5million to address student financial hardship, digital poverty and to support student unions with mental health provision
* Launched a petition to extend £500 payments to further education, part-time and non-EU international students. This was signed by over 3,200 people, was presented by John O’Dowd MLA in the NI Assembly and finally presented to the Economy Minister
* Launched a ‘Write to Your MLA’ action to ensure MLAs voted in favour of an NI Assembly motion to extend the payments. Over 4,000 emails were sent to MLA’s and the motion was unanimously passed.

**Further Education and Apprentices**

* Established a new working relationship with the FE Policy Brand of DfE and set up monthly meetings to update on issues FE students are facing, as well as contributing to the development of the ongoing FE Covid-19 Recovery strategy
* Helped secure £60 payments for every FE student to help with digital poverty, and continue campaigning for the extension of £500 payments to FE students
* NUS-USI were appointed to the Strategic Advisory Forum for Apprenticeships in NI. The group has worked on the £17 million Apprenticeship Recovery Package rolled out by DfE, and addressing employer barriers and widening participation.
* In January, the Education Minister announced that A-Level and GCSE exams for the rest of the academic year would be cancelled. BTEC students did not receive any clarification from the Economy Minister at this time. We did some lobbying and media work to ensure BTEC students were not left behind dealing with such uncertainty. 2 weeks later, BTEC students received clarity that their exams would also be cancelled for the rest of the academic year.
* Appointed to sit on various groups for NI’s new Skill Strategy; including a group to review level 4 and 5 provision and HE in FE across colleges and a group to define FE provision.

**Mental Health**

* Established a Mental Health Working Group for Officers for a 7 week period in order to submit a comprehensive response on the student perspective for the North’s 10 Year Mental Health Strategy Consultation.
* Met with the Higher Education Policy branch of DfE to discuss student mental health investment and the barriers students currently face in accessing student mental health services within institutions, alongside the need for a much more holistic and preventive approach in ensuring students are supported. This was followed by investment in SUs for mental health initiatives.

**Membership**

* Established fortnightly membership calls to deal with crisis of Covid-19 and collaborate on work across Students Unions’
* Established HE only and FE only online calls to deal specifically with issues across higher and further education in their own right, which has really helped to develop relationships among officers and created a number of shared projects which we’ve seen this year

**HSC & AHP Students Campaign**

* Worked alongside UUSU and QUBSU to develop a campaign called Support Student Health Heroes which pushes for an increase in bursary and support for HSC and AHP students in the north.
* Health Minister Robin Swann committed to a one-off payment of £2,000 for all non-salaried students on clinical placements. Massive congratulations to the officers who made this happen!

**Climate**

* Established NUS-USI as an official member of the Climate Coalition NI which is bringing forward the norths first Climate Bill. Work on the groups Media and Communications group for the bill.
* Became a board member of both SOS-UK and SOS-International and have assisted with various events and board issue throughout the year.

**Period Poverty**

* NUS-USI, UUSU, QUBSU and the USI VP Equality and Citizenship have been collaborating to tackle period poverty via action group for students across higher and further education in the north, as well as tackling the wider societal equality issue it presents.
* Met with Higher Education Policy branch of DfE twice to discuss period poverty and period product provision across third level institutions, alongside UUSU and QUBSU.

Other key pieces of work include; working alongside USI and NUS to secure access to Erasmus+ for students in the north through Irish government sponsorship; developing a proposal for FE Union funding; working with UUSU and QUBSU on the ‘Fund Our Postgrads’ campaign; representing NUS UK at European Students’ Union convention and board meeting; presenting to Councils across the north on Students Deserve Better; and working with both the NUS UK and USI teams on a range of events and campaigns throughout the year & much more!