Ciara Kealy

Leas-Uachtarán don Deisceart | Vice President for the Southern Region

The report outlines the areas of work I’ve undertaken this year as Vice President for the Southern Region. I feel quite privileged to have held this role for the past year and work with dedicated, supportive, inspirational Officers from across the island and, of course, the Southern Region. I would like to take this opportunity to wish the absolute best of luck to my successor and the 2021/22 USI Executive Team! I hope your year as part of the USI team is everything you want it to be and more.

SU Support

Unfortunately, due to limitations placed upon us this year, the support I’ve been able to offer has been in a virtual/semi-distant manner. I would have loved to support SUs on the ground, but alas, we must adapt to difficulties and changes in life. Nevertheless, I hope SU Officers have felt adequately supported by me this year.

At the beginning of the term, I met with SU Officers and teams to discuss plans for the year, campaign weeks, and their expectations of me and USI so I could learn and gauge how best to support them. I organised catch-up sessions after the Christmas Holidays as a way for Officers to refocusing on plans and priorities and also to further educate myself on how to best support them going forward.

For Part-Time Officer (PTO) support, myself and the Regional Officers held a PTO Training day in September. Sessions at the training included: What is USI; Professionalism; Meet Your Region; Self Care; Public Speaking; and segments on the work of USI Policy Officers. In the first semester I organised sessions for PTOs to drop-in if they wanted to ask questions, network or have a casual chat. In the second semester I organised an informal networking event for PTOs in the Southern Region to get to know one another in a relaxed environment. As well as the events outlined above, I kept in semi-regular contact with PTOs when there was important information or updates to communicate.

Communications

Be it via email, Zoom calls, phone calls, the Southern Region Working Group or social media platforms, this year I have tried to keep communication strong and frequent with my region in communicating information from USI to MOs and vice versa. I gave Class/Student Representatives a presentation on the structures, work and values of USI at the beginning of the term at Class/Student Rep Trainings. Following this, I attended Class/Student Rep Councils to give monthly, or bimonthly, USI Updates presentation. I engaged with society events if they asked me to come speak at a panel or event. Outside of communication with SUs and students, I have spoken with journalists and radio presenters on USI-related and student-related topics/issues. I have also tried my best to utilise social media to promote upcoming events, campaigns, infographics and resources for students and larger society.

Campaign Involvement

Due to the online nature of this year, many of the campaigns I've been involved in or supported on have been planned, discussed and executed in an online format. Such campaigns included Support Student Nurses and Midwives and the work carried out on supporting Social Care Students facing difficulties with CORU and placement. For these campaigns, USI facilitated a space for Students’ Union Officers and students to come together and discuss the pressing issues, structuring the campaign, actions to take, who to contact, brainstorming possible solutions and so on. Actions included open letters, Twitter drives, lobbying TDs, working with other relevant stakeholders and communication.

Myself and USI officers supported other campaigns via photo calls, and other means, such as End IBSA, Justice for David and Fortunate, Solidarity with Polish women and the Strajk Kobiet (Women’s Strikes), #400Welcomes, and Keep it Small, Keep it Safe, Keep your Distance.

The National Campaign, #EducationForAll, was a big part of my work this year. I attended the Campaigns Sub-Committee and Campaigns Working Group on various occasions to contribute to this campaign alongside members of the Sub-Committee and SU Officers. As a Regional Officer, I would also communicate the direction of campaigns and campaign updates, such as the Student Accommodation Bill launch, with MOs and students in the Southern Region via emails, presentations at Councils or other events.

Events/Conferences/Trainings

Back in July and August, I helped to support and/or facilitate some SUT and SUT+ sessions. I took part in Gaeilge 24 which was a fantastic event to be a part of, encouraging ár nGaeilge a úsáid ar feadh lae. I helped support Policy Officers on different events and trainings such as Pink Training, Women Lead, Sex Toy Bingo and REFLECT. I worked alongside the other Regional Officers, the Vice President for Welfare and USI’s Mental Health Programme Manager on the REFLECT event to help motivate SU Officers ahead of Semester 2. Other USI events which I have attended and/or supported in some capacity include Mental Health First Aid Training, Mature Students’ Conference and Power of Disability.

The European Students’ Union

I was delighted to be appointed as the ESU Support Officer, and work alongside the Deputy President/Vice President for Academic Affairs with USI International Affairs. I attended the 40th European Students’ Convention (ESC), the 79th Board Meeting (BM), the 41st ESC as well as consultation sessions in advance of these events. A range of different papers, statements and topics were discussed and debated at these events including: Public Responsibility, Financing and Governance of Higher Education, Housing and Transport Statement, Human Rights and Solidarity, Micro-credentials, the European Education Areas and more. At the 79th BM, myself, the Deputy President/Vice President for Academic Affairs and the President gave a presentation, as part of the ESU Membership Reassessment Process, on USI’s structures, values and work over the past 5 years. This Membership Reassessment was accepted without objection. I was also part of the ESU Mental Health Working Group where I continued the work of the Vice President for Equality and Citizenship and other ESU members on a Mental Health Charter.

Thanks for everything folks, it’s been an absolute pleasure x