Name: Clare Austick

Position: Vice President for Welfare

Introduction text

It has been an honour being the Vice President for Welfare of the Union of Students in Ireland this year. Although, the year was different to how I expected it to be, I have loved every moment of it. I’d like to give a special mention to all the SU Officers in Welfare Working Group who have been incredible student representatives.

Consent Education & Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment

**Meeting with Minister Simon Harris**

I presented to Minister Simon Harris on behalf of the National Advisory Committee where I spoke about the need for preventative initiatives to end sexual violence and harassment on our campuses and wider communities. Following that meeting, the Minister committed to making this issue a priority and actioned a number of points to that effect.

**THEA PROPEL Project**
The President and I secured a seat on the THEA PROPEL Steering Group where we developed best practice action plans, effective policies and robust procedures for HEIs to adopt and follow as guidelines. I contributed to these discussions meaningfully at every stage. We have been lobbying for the HEA to monitor the work of HEIs and oversee areas of progress made to ensure accountability and transparency for years. We have been successful in our lobbying efforts as the HEA now have more oversight and influence over HEIs.

**HEA Advisory Group for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment**I was appointed on to the HEA Advisory Group for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment to contribute to the development of two national surveys, one for staff and one for students. The aim of this group is to quantify and monitor how many people have been impacted by sexual violence and harassment.

 **National Advisory Committee**I also had a seat on the National Advisory Committee overseeing the implementation of the Framework for Consent in HEIs. I also sat on Sub-Committee III - Data Collection and Analysis.

**Active\* Consent**

I had the honour of working alongside the fantastic Active\* Consent Team with their toolkit launch to guide HEIs in the roll out of consent initiatives and the “Start Here” disclosure campaign which we partnered on with the Galway Rape Crisis Centre.

**PCHEI Anonymous Reporting Tool**

I was also involved in the PCHEI anonymous reporting tool which will hopefully be available for use in the next academic year.

Accommodation
We launched our Emergency Accommodation Provisions campaign last August where we called on the Government to implement legislation to protect student renters and offer more flexibility during Covid-19. This campaign continued throughout the year and resulted in the launch of the USI Accommodation Bill which received a huge amount of cross-party support from opposition TD’s.

Image Based Sexual Abuse

We launched our Image Based Sexual Abuse campaign in November in response to the sharing of non-consensual images, calling for legislation to be implemented immediately. We were delighted to hear of the passing of this legislation which makes the sharing of non-consensual images a criminal offence in Ireland. A lot more needs to be done in terms of stigma reduction and ensuring there are supports for those who have been affected but I am hopeful work can be continued as the conversation has begun.

Mental Health

**Campaigns**
We changed the messaging of our mental health campaign “Togetherness-Le Chéile” to reflect the climate around staying connected during Covid-19. We also marked World Mental Health Day by coordinating local actions across the country highlighting that everyone has mental health which fluctuates by the interactions we have and the environments we are in. The Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework was also launched on that day which will provide a template for HEIs to follow in addressing student mental health. We also ran a “Destress for Success” campaign around exams to encourage students to check-in with themselves and not let the stress and pressure of exams get to them. We’ve also launched a new podcast and webinar series as part of an overarching wellbeing campaign.

**Relationship Building**The USI Mental Health Programme Manager and myself had a very close working relationship with PCHEI, Bodywhys, Mental Health Reform and NOSP. We pushed for the Connecting for Life working group to start meeting regularly again to oversee the implementation of the Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework.

**Awareness Days Marked**

* International Overdose Awareness Day
* International Recovery Day
* World Suicide Prevention Day
* First Irish Traveller Mental Health Day
* World Mental Health Day
* World Kindness Day
* International Men’s Day
* International Survivor of Suicide Loss Day
* International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Sexual Health

Our Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance campaign focused on sexual activity during Covid-19, STI stigma reduction and sexual empowerment. We also updated our USI SHAG website and had great fun hosting online Sex Toy Bingo.

Body Awareness
Our Body Awareness Week included messaging around body image, the impact of Covid-19, selfcare and myth busting around eating disorders. I also spoke on the Bodywhys panel discussion as part of their Eating Disorder Awareness Week. We are also working together to develop a section for third level students on their Bodywhys website. We’ve also started a partnership with PSI Special Interest Group on Eating Disorders.

Substance Use and Misuse

This year I worked very closely with HSE Social Inclusion to roll out national campaigns including “Knowing the Signs” and “International Overdose Awareness Week” around drug harm reduction and the effects of substance use. I also facilitated frequent meetings between the HSE Social Inclusion Rep and SU Officers to speak about emerging drug trends. We also supported the roll out of the national Drug Use in Higher Education survey. The findings will inform future campaigns and policies.

Women Lead 2021
Women Lead is one of the most important events in the USI calendar. It encouraged me to run for election many years ago and showed me what we as women were capable of when we believed in ourselves. I was honoured to be the lead organiser for Women Lead this year. Thank you to all the attendees who made this event a success.