**Congress Clár Annual Report Template**

Kevin McStravock

Deputy President & Vice President for Academic Affairs / Tanáiste agus Leas-Uachtarán do Chúrsaí Acadúla

My two terms as your Vice President for Academic Affairs are coming to an end – it has been an honour and a privilege to have represented the academic interests of 374,000+ students over the last two years and I’m grateful to those who put their faith in me over the last two years. Best of luck to the next VPAA and the new team!

### COVID-19 Recovery

At the start of the year, we launched the Student Experience of COVID-19 Survey Report, which also fed into the QQI report on how the sector responded to COVID-19. Since then, I also led on the development of a Position Paper on Semester 1 Delivery and the Digital & Distance Learning Paper which passed at November National Council.

I have engaged in numerous COVID-19 committees. Some of the outputs of this work included the funding made available for devices which we have monitored closely through AAWG. I have also worked to support SUs in adapting representation structures to the online environment through the roll-out of the Representation campaign.

### The National Student Engagement Programme [NStEP]

NStEP has went from strength to strength this year with the relaunch of the National Student Training Programme coinciding with the sudden move to a mostly online environment. They trained 1,309 Academic Reps in Semester 1. We also ran a join Student Voice Summit in March 2021. I have also engaged in Project Groups on a new Student Engagement Framework and a Digital Badge course on Student Engagement, and chaired regular Network and Advisory Group meetings. The USI President & I are beginning to work with the Steering Committee to map out the next phase for NStEP post its’ current funding period of December 2021.

### Student Representation in the Sector

Working with the National Forum, we launched the Student Associate Assembly - associates have contributed to numerous projects including the promotion of the Teaching Heroes Awards which were rolled out in Semester 1. I have also worked closely with the Forum to develop a joint research project on Embedding Wellbeing In the Curriculum. This report will be launched in June 2021.

I’ve continued to chair National Academic Integrity Network’s Communications Working Group alongside QQI and we rolled out the first student-facing campaign on Academic Integrity, #MyOwnWork in October.

Student Survey.ie pivoted fully online for fieldwork in 2021 and I worked with SUs and the Project Manager to collaboratively brainstorm ideas for promotion and to support and aid in the fieldwork process. We also fed into the development of a COVID-19 question set for this year’s survey which will feed directly into the SLWE Working Group.

### Professional Accreditation & Work Based Learning

USI has engaged closely with SUs and students on the ground in a number of professions, particularly Nursing & Midwifery and Social Care. Engaging with students in these professions has helped to develop our understanding of the issues and to lobby nationally on these. We have engaged with professional bodies, trade unions, institutional representative bodies and the Departments of Health and Further & Higher Education to push for engagement with students in resolving issues that have arisen – mostly relating to placement.

I also led consultation responses to the QQI Principles for Accreditation and CORU Statement of Strategy. I have also rewritten the Placement & Work-Based Learning Strategy which will inform USI’s work on placement and work-based learning over the coming years.

### International Affairs and Brexit

Alongside the VP South, I have supported all members participating in ESU events, all of which have taken place online. USI successfully underwent Membership Reassessment this year and was praised for the work it has carried out over the last five years as part of this process. I attended the Ministerial Conference as part of the Irish Delegation in November 2020. I have engaged in sessions on European Universities and fed this information forward to SUs.

USI was pleased to see the Irish Government committing to underwriting access to the Erasmus+ for students in the North, and we will work closely to oversee the implementation of this. I have worked closely with NUS-USI to monitor developments stemming from Brexit, and to seek answers.

### Policy & Engagement

I have developed briefings on a range of issues including CAO & UCAS, the QQI CINNTE process, Budget 2021 and more. I also developed a comprehensive policy paper on Marketisation of Higher Education which has helped to inform the work we have carried out through the Education For All Campaign.

I have sought to make AAWG a collaborative space and have facilitated the sharing of best practice and local issues between MOs so we can support one another through a very tough year.

### Partnership, Autonomy & Union Development

USI have developed a Terms of Reference with the Department regarding a Strategic Dialogue with a view to the development of a National Student Partnership Agreement and hope to progress this further by the end of the year.

I led out on the USI submission to the Apprenticeship Action Plan alongside the VP for Campaigns and VP Equality & Citizenship. We have also developed relationships with FET Colleges Ireland and hope to progress discussions on expanding USI’s FET membership. I have developed a new FET Strategy which will hopefully serve as a blueprint for improving student representation within FET.

Alongside the USI President, I led on USI’s submission to the HEA Act Reform.

### Deputy President

It was my honour to serve as the Deputy President this year, and to support the work of the USI President and the Executive Team. As Deputy President, I have ensured that National Council Documentation and key work of the Executive Team is completed and distributed on time and have supported the Exec Team alongside, and in the absence of the USI President.

I have once again led on the SAAIs. We have secured sponsorship for nearly all categories this year, and are currently in the midst of planning for the virtual awards ceremony.