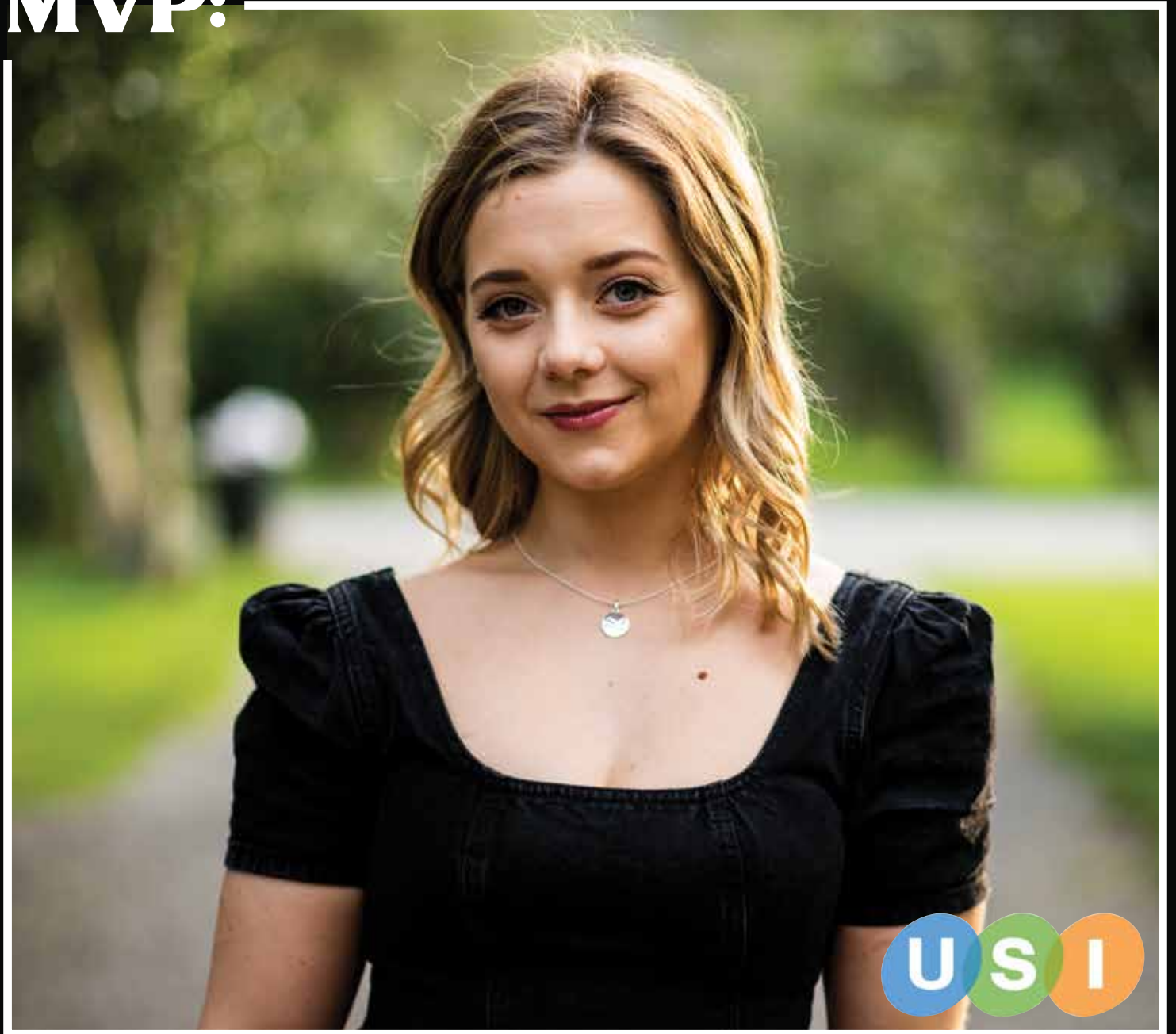


MVP:



**Megan's Manifesto
for VP for
Academic Affairs**

MVP: Megan for VP for Academic Affairs

My name is Megan O' Connor, and I am hoping to be your next Vice President for Academic Affairs with the Union of Students Ireland 2021/2022.

My name is Megan O' Connor, and I want to be your next Vice President for Academic Affairs with the Union of Students Ireland.

Currently I am the Deputy President and Education Officer of TCDSU and have spent the last 5 years involved in the student movement. I am a General Nursing graduate and between being a rep and an academic senator, to the off-campus part time officer, I have loved every minute of my journey to date

I strongly believe that I am the right person for this position as it is something I am incredibly passionate about, this is what I want to do and I have been working towards this over the past five years. I am hopeful that I get the opportunity to show you what I can offer to the role of Vice President for Academic Affairs on the USI Executive 2021/2022.

To keep up to date with my campaign, please check out my social media accounts!

I am always available to answer any questions, explain more about what I want to offer to the role or if you just want a chat!

Instagram - *MeganForAcademicAffairs*
Facebook - *Megan for Academic Affairs*
Twitter - *@AcadeMegAffairs*

The past year has brought a great deal of uncertainty to students who are undeniably fearful of the impact that the pandemic is having on this crucial period in their lives. The increased reliance on digital learning this past year has further exposed the systemic flaws in the traditional approach to higher education.

Education is a public good, a public responsibility, and should be publicly supported and funded. Higher education should never become subject to the ideologies of marketisation and privatisation and I am committed to working alongside the President, the VP for Campaigns and every student across the country to ensure this does not happen.

We have great potential to influence and re-define the future of higher education in Ireland and I am committed to ensuring a more accessible and inclusive approach for all as your next Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Equity and Accessibility

I will work for the funding of and implementation of the Universal Design for Learning across all institutions. I aim to do this by working with AHEAD, lobbying for and promoting the provision of staff training. As part of this, I will work towards a minimum requirement framework for all institutions.

I will coordinate with European Students Union (ESU) member organisations to gather data on physical accessibility and disability supports for students who wish to participate in exchange programmes.

There has been fantastic work done with Diversity in STEM in recent years. I will continue to promote and support this work, while also promoting the same principles and opportunities across all disciplines.

There are insufficient supports and access routes for students with disabilities applying to Postgraduate courses which I will work to address with the VP for Postgraduate Affairs and VP for Equality and Citizenship.

In collaboration with the Leas-Uachtarán don Ghaeilge, I will ensure, insofar as is possible, that Gaeilge is incorporated into everything I do. *Le comhobair leis an Leas-Uachtarán don Ghaeilge, déanfaidh mé cinnte de go bhfuil an Ghaeilge ag croílár gach rud a dhéanaim.*

Digital Learning

No matter what the next year brings, aspects of the online teaching and learning world are certainly here to stay. I will work to ensure that we keep the benefits of this online model which includes greater accessibility for all students and demand better resources and conditions for all those who have fallen through the cracks.

The digital divide is a barrier to students' education. I will continue and build upon the lobbying efforts of this year to further expand connectivity services and funding for devices for all students.

I will work with MO's and Trade Unions to form policies on the recording and captioning of lecture content.

Online proctoring is a system built on mistrust. Use of such technology is unreliable, undermines the integrity of assessments and is poor practice. I will continue the work I am already doing with the National Academic Integrity Network and AHEAD to ensure best practice guidelines and online assessment frameworks are provided to institutions.

In collaboration with the Irish Librarian Association, Lobbying for the provision of further funding for and the creation of Open Education Resources (OER's). Due to rising costs & deeply flawed licensing conditions for electronic resources such as journals or databases, libraries across the country are facing a significant shortage of resources, directly impacting students every day.

Partnership and Representation

I will continue the work on, and finally complete the National Student Partnership Agreement while assisting local MO's with furthering the autonomy of their Student Unions.

I will work to ensure every student is invited to and feels welcome to, liaise with the USI and to participate in consultation of policy formation which directly impacts their student experience.

I will work with the Irish Secondary Students' Union (ISSU) to ensure that the next generation of Higher Education students are supported from the very beginning.

The National Student Engagement Programme (NSTEP) is going from strength to strength and I will continue the work being completed and further expand on it's services.

I will facilitate the provision of 'top-up training' throughout the year which I have run very successfully in my SU this year. Further training opportunities are required for both officers and students alike. Let's start the conversation and include all students as empowered partners in our policy formation.

I will work to strengthen the relationship between USI and the Further Education and Training sector and assist in increasing their student representation structures.

Students in the Creative Arts have been disproportionately affected over the past year with limited resources, decreased graduate opportunities and continued insufficient government funding. I am committed to working in partnership with student representatives and ensuring that these students' voices are heard as a priority on a national level.

Institutional & Structure Reform

Through consultation and the utilisation of data from the INdEx Survey, Student Survey etc., I will lobby for the required reformations to various aspects to the Higher Education Sector.

I will work towards tackling the various challenges with Further Education in Ireland. I will work with the FET sector to support the FET Strategy '20-25, to promote simplified pathways to further education and to improve student experience. I will ensure the CAO reform is inclusive of the needs of students in apprenticeships and FET's.

I will look for the expansion of entrance exams for all higher education institutions. I will also work to support ISSU and Educational and Training Board's (ETB's) with the provision of broader Leaving Certificate subject choices to ensure those in single gender, rural or gaelscoil schools are not at a disadvantage when applying to HE.

I will work in collaboration with NUS-USI to continue to support students from the North and work to improve cross-border mobility opportunities.

Placement and work based learning needs an overhaul. As a Nursing graduate I am very familiar with the sector and

I will continue the work that's already begun with QQI and the National Forum and I will continue to lobby for the provision of fair financial support for students completing unpaid work placements. I will also collaborate with SU's, institutions, the government and professional regulatory bodies to develop MOU's between all institutions and placement locations to ensure the fair and equitable provision placement for all students

I will work alongside and support Students' Unions in colleges undergoing mergers to ensure standardisation across each affiliated campus. I will ensure equitable representation for MOs in contributing to the governing bodies of their institution.

Postgraduate work needs to be recognised as formal work with taxable income. Stipends are entirely insufficient and inappropriate. I will work with the VP for Postgraduate Affairs and the Postgraduates Workers Alliance to ensure this issue is at the forefront of the agenda next year.

I am committed to securing neurodivergent diagnosis services for third level students in conjunction with the VP for Welfare and VP for Equality and Citizenship. Once an individual turns 18 years old, there are few supports in place and this must urgently be addressed.

Higher Education Funding

As long as Higher Education comes at a cost, it will remain inaccessible to too many. We need a coherent Student Finance system in order to prevent students from continuing to fall through the cracks and with one of the most decentralised student finance systems in Europe, we have a long way to go.

The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is in fact not universal, but a symptom of broader Higher Education underfunding. A full review of SUSI has been ordered by the Minister for Higher Education to be completed this year;

- I will work alongside the President to ensure that the major barriers including the special-rate and the non-adjacent rate of SUSI are expanded.
- Integrate the 1916 Bursary into the CAO application alongside DARE and HEAR.
- Campaign for a universal approach to late and repeat fees as well as international student fee certainty.
- In collaboration with MO's I will seek to address and eradicate additional course costs such as vaccinations, uniforms and material costs.

Empowerment and Provision of Information

One of the most important aspects of the role is to inform and empower students across the country. As your Vice President for Academic Affairs, I believe this can be achieved in a number of ways; through the renewal of Academic specific campaigns, creating new and targeting social media accounts and working closely with the other VP's on cross-sectoral issues. I am also committed to assisting Students' Unions with the expansion of available resources such as Campaign graphic templates which can be edited to reflect local arrangements.

I will completely renew the Destress for Success campaign in collaboration with the VP for Welfare and will work with Students for Sensible Drug Policy to provide easily accessible information on study drugs.

I will work with the ISSU to run a "Transition to Third Level" campaign so as many students as possible across the country know who the USI is, from the minute you accept your college offer.

I will work with MO's to promote the various Erasmus+ internship opportunities for students.

I will, in collaboration with the Exec team and external experts, facilitate workshops in everything from policy formation to time management and study skills, throughout the year which are open to all students interested.

National Academic Integrity Week, in close collaboration with QQI needs to be a priority for the coming year. I will expand on the available resources and further the conversation with MO's and students across the country.

MVP: