

ROBERT MURTAGH FOR NUS USI PRESIDENT

WHO AM I?

My name's Robert Murtagh, and for the past year I have been the Student Activities Officer at QUBSU.

I am running to be the next NUS-USI President because I believe in the ability of the student movement to make a difference.

The history of the Student movement is one of fighting for change. I take inspiration from the change students have made across the World. It was students in 1960s USA who sat at the white only counter-tops opposing segregation and racism. It was students across the World who were the first to stand in solidarity with the people of South Africa as they struggled against apartheid. And, it was students in Ireland who were instrumental in creating seismic social change as they fought for marriage equality and reproductive justice.

That is why I am running, because the work isn't over, and we must continue to fight for free education, to promote student welfare, to build stronger unions and to create a fairer and more equal N.I., for all.



PROMOTING STUDENT WELFARE

Student welfare is at the cornerstone of the work students' unions across NI do.

It is critical that the students of NI speak with one united voice on issues such as:

- Consent
- Mental Health
- Sex Education
- Accommodation
- Welfare Reform

Consent and Sex education

If elected NUS-USI President I will work with the NUS-USI Women's Officer and the Department for Justice to implement the results of the 'Know More' Survey ensuring they are featured in the Gillen Review, and acted upon. We must demand a change in the definition of rape. Consent must be embedded within FEs and HEs as part of proper, evidence based sex education. If elected NUS-USI President, I will fight to ensure standardised sex education is introduced in NI.

Mental Health

Mental health is one of the biggest issues of our day. It affects a huge number of our students. As Students Unions we can and should be at the fore of tackling this epidemic.

Taking the results of NUS-USI mental health survey, I will work with each MO to help them form their own bespoke institutional mental health framework. We must work to tackle the causes of mental health as well as increasing the support for those with existing mental health issues.

Accommodation

When I ran for QUBSU Activities Officer I ran on a platform with student housing at its centre. I want to continue this work as NUS-USI President. I will continue the work Olivia has started in setting up a landlord rating scheme so that Landlords can finally be held accountable, and I will support each MO in fighting for decent and affordable accommodation.

EDUCATION AS A RIGHT, NOT A COMMODITY!

Nelson Mandela said "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the World."

In order to change the world, education must be accessible to everyone.

NUS-USI under my leadership will fight to make education accessible to everyone.

- I will oppose any attempts to further marketise education, higher or further.
- Our institutions must exist to educate, not to make profit.
- All subjects must be valued, not just those that make money.
- I want to create a coalition for publicly funded education with trade unions and other groups to have the loudest voice possible against any increase in tuition fees.
- We will support the Unions of lecturers and teachers in fights for fair and decent pay and opposing cuts to pensions.



POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

It is vital that NUS-USI does more to help Postgraduate students. If elected NUS-USI President I will help both QUB and UU fight against the ridiculous situation that many Postgrad students find themselves in because of the incompetence of the Student Loans Company. Many low income, disabled students or students with dependents who study part time, are being forced to drop out of their degrees as the loan does not cover the full amount of their degree because of the incompetence of the 'Student Loans Company.'

If elected I will support the work of the University and College Union (UCU) anti-casualisation committee to fight for better pay and conditions for Postgraduate Research Students.

NUS-USI under my leadership will lobby to get the Govt to commit to a PG maintenance loan. The govt must be committed to knocking down barriers to education, not reinforcing them. Despite the introduction of Fee loans, many people, particularly those from low-incomes, cannot take on a Postgraduate degree if they want because of the serious financial pressures. This must change.

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STRONGER FE'S

It is absolutely key that NUS-USI continues to support FE Union Development.

Student Voice

It is critical that this development ensures that your students voices are heard. If elected NUS-USI President I will work with each FE Union to develop your own institutional 'memorandum of understanding'.

This institutional contract will be bespoke to each Union so as to ensure there is a healthy structure for staff, but the main aim is to ensure your voice as the representatives of the student body is respected. You must be partners in your education, not just passive learners. Your institution must respect and listen to you.

If your institution still doesn't listen to you, as NUS-USI President I will support you in demanding the institution sits up and listen, there are many ways this can be achieved and I will work with you to achieve it.

If elected I will lobby the Department for the Economy to demand that the voices of students' unions are heard and listened to.

Clubs and Societies

Another key aspect to FE Union Development are Clubs and Societies. For Unions that struggle with engagement, Clubs and Societies are a great way to combat this.

As Student Activities Officer at QUBSU, I am the officer responsible for Clubs and Societies. This year I lobbied QUB for an extra £13,500 funding for Clubs and Socs. If elected NUS-USI President I will use this passion to help you embed Clubs and Socs in your respective constitutions. This will strengthen not only your constitution but your engagement with students.

Oppose the marketisation of FE

If elected your NUS-USI President I will fight the marketisation of further education. I fundamentally believe our institutions must exist to educate, not to make profit.

Conference

If elected NUS-USI President I will work to create an annual conference where students and staff from all FE colleges in NI can meet and discuss successes and challenges. It is key that best practice is shared across NI; communication is at the heart of success.

Better terms for Apprentices

If elected NUS-USI President I will work with the National Society of Apprentices to fight for better terms and working conditions for Apprentices. It is a disgrace that some Apprentices earn below the minimum wage, this cannot continue. Apprentices deserve better, and we need a NUS-USI that's going to fight, apprentices are not 'cheap labour,' and should be paid properly for the work they do.

Union of Students in Ireland

The motto of USI is "Ni neart go cur le cheile" which means "In Unity there is Strength." This unity must include FEs. FE students make up approx. 100,000 students within USI and they cannot be forgotten. If elected NUS-USI President I will ensure USI does more to fight for the rights of FE students in NI. This must include fighting against the imposition of a hard border on the Island of Ireland. This would be disastrous, particularly for FE students who live in the Republic but go to college in the North. We also must work with USI to ensure there is a lobbying effort to support students financially who live in the Republic but study at an FE in the North.

FIGHTING FOR EQUALITY

It is shameful that today NI still lags behind the UK and the Republic in terms of equal rights.

But hope exists, as we have been seen in the Republic, as students can and have been at the forefront of fighting for equality.

Under my leadership NUS-USI will continue fighting for:

Marriage equality
Trans Rights
Acht na gaeilge
Reproductive Justice
Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Though these groups have separate struggles, they are united in one common fight, for a better, fairer and above all more equal NI.

As NUS-USI President I will do whatever I can to support NUS-USI liberation officers in the fight for equality. As NUS-USI President and a member of NUS NEC I will ensure the liberation issues of people in NI are never forgotten, and NUS Liberation Officers continue to support NUS-USI.

As President I will ensure NUS-USI is at the forefront of opposing racism and fascism on our streets. I am proud of how diverse our student population is, from Belfast to Strabane our streets must be a welcoming place for students of all faiths and colour



BREXIT

There can be no doubt that Brexit is bad for students, and the future is uncertain.

By the time I take up post there are a number of scenarios that may have played out:

1) Left the EU with a deal and enter into a transition period.

In this case, as NUS-USI President I will fight to ensure that there is agreement by the end of the transition year on issues like ERASMUS, EU citizens right to remain and travel, tuition fees for Republic students and other areas covered in the NUS-USI Brexit strategy paper.

2) Article 50 will have been extended

In this case, as NUS-USI President I will fight for a second vote, to ensure that the people are given the chance to decide the outcome, democracy didn't end on the 23rd June 2016.

3) Crash out with no deal

I believe this is the least likely outcome as Parliament has made it clear they will not allow this to happen. However, if this does happen our immediate focus has to be ensuring there is no hard border on the Island of Ireland, and I will fight to ensure this does not happen.