

Hi everyone! My name is Natasha Horan, and I want to be your next Student Welfare Officer. I am currently a fourth year Arts student studying English and Sociology and I'm from Limerick.

My primary focus in this position is putting the student voice at the forefront. I want to continue the excellent work that the current Student Welfare Officer is doing to make UL a safe space for all by being approachable, lending an ear, and tackling the issues which are the most important to you.

Here are a few of the things I want to focus on during my time in office:

### **Support for Commuters and Students who Drive**

My entire four years in UL has been bookended by commuting. I live on the opposite end of the 304 bus route, meaning on a good day it takes me around 40 minutes to get to college and an hour to get home, but often way longer than that. This is the reality for many students, especially as the parking issue gets exponentially worse on campus. I want to look into the possibility of getting a direct Raheen to UL shuttle bus which could cut down the time students who have to travel the whole route take to get to college exponentially. In terms of bus shelters, there is just simply not enough sheltered space to accommodate the Irish weather, particularly in the winter months. With buses often coming late, or not showing up at all, far more shelter and seating is a necessity, and I want to push for this.

Being a commuter also means a lot of downtime before and between classes. I believe there should be more designated chill spaces on campus where students can go to relax during these times. The commuter hub ran by Student Life is an excellent resource, and there should be far more like it available. Many spaces already provided by the college such as the various canteens and restaurants can be extremely noisy, and there is a severe lack of other options for those who want some downtime. This of course is not limited to commuting students. I want to make this happen, and the opening of the new Student Life building, where there will be plenty more rooms available to host this kind of thing makes this so achievable.

The unreliability of the buses a lot of the time also means far more students are now driving, but there is simply not enough space for everyone. With the free car parks filling up so fast, students are forced to pay for the €3 ones, adding yet another cost to daily life, especially as there is planning involved to ensure you have the coins for the machine. The fastest and most likely change I see for UL to do is the implementation of some sort of parking allowing

students to prepay for parking through their cards instead, possibly with a discount applied for current UL students.

### **Accommodation**

The issue of accommodation is deeply stuck in a supply and demand cycle at the moment. Affordable housing has become merely a dream for the vast majority of students and that includes UL's own. The price of on-campus accommodation has risen to the point that it is unfeasible for many students to avail of it. I want to continue the work of the current Welfare Officer in order to get this price more in line with what a student during a cost-of-living crisis can afford, including a system for students to share reputable private landlords in the area to reduce the number of students in unsafe or scam housing.

### **Student Poverty**

There is a disproportionate level of students who are living off the bare minimum in order to complete their education. The college took a step in the right direction this semester with bringing in KSG to take over many of the restaurant options within campus buildings. There are now far more affordable options for meals through this system, but this should not be the end of this push towards affordability. Other colleges have subsidised shops on campus for students, but that is not the case in UL. Spar can work out very expensive if you are using it regularly, and there are not a lot of options for cheaper items in the vicinity, particularly for those commuting who cannot leave campus to search for them.

Access to food at an affordable price is something that everyone should be entitled to, and I believe we have a duty as a community to make sure that this is upheld. In previous years, UL has had a food pantry that students can access, I want to bring this back. I also believe there should be far more areas on campus to heat up food brought from home. Not everyone can afford to eat on campus all of the time, even with the price drops through the new catering service, and the lack of microwaves is currently a huge deterrent for many students to bring food from home.

### **Sustainability**

With UL being such a large college, sustainability is extremely important. Workshops are an excellent way to instil fun into the concept so the continuation of this is a priority for me. UL is a campus full to the brim with single use cans and bottles, so I believe there should be an option on campus to return them. The ideal would be getting a return machine, but other

colleges have an option through their on-campus shops to get your deposit money back, and I think that would be an excellent facility for a campus as large as UL. This would also reduce waste throughout campus as there would be less cans and bottles in bins. This idea is a huge one for me, as it also helps students to keep more money in their pockets through the deposit system.

The paper waste involved in the campaign process is not an irony that is lost on me, and I promise to make sure that any and all promotional materials that I use will be correctly recycled where possible and otherwise disposed of ethically. This is something that I promise to take on personally after my campaign is complete.

### **Mental and Physical Health Supports**

The current health supports, both mental and physical, in the college are often not up to par. There is a far higher demand for the counselling service than there is availability, which puts a huge strain on the service, often meaning those that are able to use it do not find it to be as helpful as it should be. This issue extends to the on-campus doctor as well, which is also far too expensive for what it is. These facilities must reflect what students need and are able to afford, otherwise they are useless. Having conversations with those in charge of these facilities is something I want to do as Welfare Officer to see how this can be improved as the current system in both cases is simply not working for students.

I also promise to continue the welfare department's great work on harm reduction and drug awareness through readily available information and workshops in order to keep all students safe.

### **Sexual Health Awareness**

Over the last few years there has been a fantastic push by previous Welfare Officers to ensure previously 'taboo' topics are spoken about openly and informatively. I want to continue this excellent work through events like Viva La Vulva and various other interactive sexual health awareness campaigns such as free STI testing facilities just to name some. It is extremely important to me to ensure that UL is a place where no one feels ashamed. I want this to also extend to access to a wider range of reproductive and menstrual products throughout campus. I endeavour to make sure that pads and tampons are available in every bathroom, regardless of gender. Currently, they are sparsely available in women's bathrooms, but the emphasis is on sparsely. Ensuring that these critical resources are readily available to anyone who may need them is extremely important, and now more than ever as the price of these essentials

skyrocket. If keeping these items stocked within bathrooms is the issue, I want to ensure that they are available within the Student Life building itself so that everyone knows where to go to get exactly what they need. This extends to condoms, lube, dental dams, and any other resources that students would be availing of.

I promise to do all of this and more if I am elected as your Student Welfare Officer. I promise to work with students to better the experience for everyone. If there is something I haven't touched on here that you think needs to be addressed in the welfare department, please reach out! I want to hear from you about how to make UL a better place!

Issued by Zuzanna Koloda, Campaign Manager for Natasha Horan