

Hi, I'm Síofra

I am running to be your next Student President.

Where might you know me from?

I am currently your Student Welfare Officer and Deputy president, and I am loving it. From running campaigns in the courtyard to representing you at a university level in Governing Authority I have advocated for your welfare needs and will continue to do so if you vote Síofra for President. My successful campaigns this year included Penis Power, Flourish Fest, and Viva la Vulva. Whilst I am enjoying my time as Welfare Officer, I have so much more I want to do from the Presidential position.



Here is a little bit more about me!

I graduated in August from Product Design and Technology. I am from the beautiful town of Killarney in County Kerry. I am typically seen running around with a little camera taking pictures of everyone, especially at Techno Tuesday, and sometimes DJing on stage in stables or at charity week! I make a lot of my clothes myself and this would be my main hobby. I have tried my fair share of clubs and societies over the years and have found my sense of community through them. My mission is to make everyone feel heard and supported and create a stronger community in UL. I want to make student life as interesting and accessible as possible for all students.

Food Access

Food access is a problem most students face in university. I want to find ways to make food more accessible and save students money. The Commuter Hub is a great initiative running for the past couple of years, but this is truly a plaster for the problem at hand. We are seeing more than 100 students a day accessing free food between 8am - 9am and recently this has been expanded to 4 days a week, Monday to Thursday. I want to continue to run this initiative and secure extra funding to provide more free food to students, especially when we move over to the new Student Centre. This is an officer lead initiative with support of volunteers and falls under UL Student Life. My goal is for the university to acknowledge the importance of this service and provide more initiatives like the Commuter Hub. **This is why I have been**

working hard to provide a food pantry to students with no barriers to access. This would mean students would have access to **free food when they need it.** We have now started the conversation and are making moves on the project, but I want to continue to put pressure on the university to make it happen sooner rather than later. I have been working hard on this since September, and I want to continue this work to get it over the line in my term. Other colleges across the country have implemented this system already meaning UL is extremely behind amid a cost-of-living crisis.

An initiative from my manifesto last year was bringing back the Lidl bus. Which was a service dropped 3 years ago. **I am happy to note that this has finally made it over the line allowing those without access to a car to freely go to Lidl and access cheaper food.** This is a huge win as I know previous officers over the past couple of years have been trying to reinstate this service.

Health access

Everything is expensive but that doesn't mean the doctor should be. On my manifesto last year, I was, and I still am passionate about our student medical centre. In UL, visiting a GP sets a student back €30 per visit whilst in other colleges such as MIC this service costs the student €10. Other slightly cheaper services such as nurse and phone consultations in UL are €20, which is a free service in most other colleges across the country. I want to continue to work on bringing the costs down to reflect the costs of other campuses, if they can do it, why can't we? Often students do not go due to the financial barrier in place putting their health at risk. **In various meetings throughout the year, I continued to push to improve our services drastically.** I am glad to say my work has paid off and **I am currently working with the Medical Centre to revamp and improve their services.** With this revamp we are reviewing everything to best serve you as a student wanting accessible medical services. It has been an amazing opportunity having the student voice at the table and I want to continue to have my voice speaking up for your needs.

The counselling service is another, which I have been pushing for more funding to improve at all committee and board meetings of the university. **I am happy to say they are now reviewing the service.** The service is under constant pressure as they are understaffed with a ratio of 1 counsellor for every 3,333 students which is alarming as the EU recommended safe average is 1 counsellor to every 1000 students. I want to continue to push for more staff to be hired in this division so the service can be quickly accessed by students when they need it most without having to be on the waiting list. **I raised this point with Minister O'Donovan** (former Minister for Further and Higher education) where I pushed for more funding in these areas and highlighted the importance of mental health on campus. I would like the opportunity to continue to raise this issue with the newly elected Minister James Lawless.

Accommodation

Accommodation has been one of the most prominent problems for students over the past few years. With this problem, pricing is skyrocketing. On-campus accommodation for the next academic year in Dromroe is costing €7,164 whilst in 2015 for the same apartment it was costing €4,810. I want campus accommodation to be more reasonably priced and regulated. A huge win that our current student president, Ronan Cahill achieved this year is that instead of a 2% increase on accommodation he advocated for students to have it lowered through negotiations to 1.5% increase saving students money. **I want to continue to push for lower prices making the move to university more financially accessible.**

For those who choose to live off campus, it can be difficult to find houses and landlords you can trust. I want to set up a better system where landlords in the area can post their houses directly to students rather than by word of mouth. The university currently have Student Pad, which is a move in the right direction but the accommodation that is posted on that is either far away, too expensive, or only available Monday to Friday. This is unacceptable and I want to continue to improve this service.

With my experience, **I will take this fight to the national level.** UL say they do not have enough money I will fight day and night with the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Further and Higher Education in ensuring UL is prioritised in terms of funding and grants for student accommodation, where UL can no longer say they do not have the funds. **This is the only way to ensure we get capital funding to tackle the accommodation crisis in UL once and for all.**

Commuter Services

Commuter students make up a sizeable portion of the student body and with this comes a lot of expense on these students.

For students that take the bus, there is not enough seating or shelter at the UL bus stop when everybody is waiting to go home in the evenings. Buses are often late, and students typically have electronics such as laptops, headphones, and tablets and not having shelter exposes them to the risk of water damage to their expensive devices. Therefore, I want to continue to push for more bus shelters as it is a clear problem for so many students.

Financial aid

We are amid a cost-of-living crisis which is having a knock-on effect on students in all areas of their lives. Being able to afford necessities such as food and rent is difficult.

The student assistant fund and financial aid is a vital resource for a lot of students, where the advice team has dispersed a substantial amount of money to students who need it since August 2024. This has led to there being little to no funds left for semester two, meaning we are looking for funding from other sources and not being able to support as many people as we would like to support. This is alarming as more people need extra funds and this is not possible. I want to continue to **highlight this gap to the university and push for more funding to support the students who need it most.**

The laptop loan scheme was ended this year and is having a huge effect on students as they are not able to afford laptops and therefore sacrificing necessities. **I want to and have already started to raise my concerns and I am fighting for reimplementing of this scheme.**

Clubs and societies

Clubs and societies budgets are suffering at the moment with more members joining and funding staying the same. This is unacceptable. Under the current UL student life budget 50% of funding goes to clubs and societies whilst the other 50% funds other UL student life activities and operations. As a member of the board of directors of UL Student Life I have seen the numbers and it is extremely concerning. I want to lobby the university to acknowledge the importance of Clubs and Societies and dedicate more funds to this sector. The university use footage and claim success for these students wins but have not increased the funding as the student numbers have increased. **I want to push for a more sustainable funding model for Clubs and Societies allowing the budget to grow with the growth of the Club or Society and for these student run clubs and societies to be fairly rewarded for their massive important contribution to the UL Community.**

Academic progression and fees

Our current student President and Academic officer are working on abolishing the repeat fees. They have come along leaps and bounds with this. Repeat fees are €171 for each exam which is unfeasible, especially if you have more than one repeat. UCC and UCD abolished their repeat fees, and I want UL follow in their footsteps. Building on this, those who repeat exams or take an I-grade in their final year are unable to graduate with their class. This is due to repeats taking place the week before graduation. This is disappointing after working hard to graduate and timings of exams hindering you from this. The University is about to embark on a project to completely revamp the Student Record System, meaning over the course of the next year there will be drastic changes to the way students' progress in terms of exam timings, graduation timings, grading bands etc. This is a big move in terms of the academic culture here in UL and with my experience from this year I am the best person to lead UL Student Life forward as President to ensure that no changes are made that negatively affect UL Students. **I will push to change the timeline of exams to allow students to graduate with**

their friends alongside preventing the University from taking away compensating fails and the current I-Grade System.

Sustainability in UL

Re-return should be readily available on campus. I believe, if you are having to pay the higher price for this service, it should be readily available on campus to return empty containers and claim money back. **I want to put pressure on the university to install a re-return machine on campus so students can claim their money back.**

I am passionate about unnecessary waste and conscious of how much money students spend on household items during college, especially those on Erasmus or moving out of home for the first time. I would like to introduce a sustainable service to our campus where people can bring any items such as clothes and household items that they are getting rid of at the end of term to be redistributed to incoming students and minimise their waste footprint and help students save money.

New student centre

I, like many students am very excited for the opening of the new student centre this year and the potential it is about to unlock in terms of events and clubs and societies having their own spaces. I want to host events in this building and use it for its intended purpose – gathering students and building a sense of community within the building. With this new centre, we are losing our common room which acts as an area for students to have lunch and hang out and heat up their lunch. I want to make the spaces in the new student centre inviting to eat and hangout. With this there is a First 7 Weeks revamp coming next year. If I am elected president, I will work hard to maintain this space to be open for longer periods in both semesters and provide even more services for students. First 7 Weeks adds a sense of community as a service led by the university rather than the students union. It would be my hope that First 7 Weeks would be able to absorb the commuter hub and make this an all day hub.

With this move into our new student centre, it also **raises the question of what will happen to our current students union building in the courtyard**, which back in the early 2000's was also funded by students. If elected Student President, I will fight to **keep this space student centred and student focused**. With my experience and the relationships I have built, I am the President to lead forward, on keeping this space and advocating to have it turned into an all student hub. As I said Student space is lacking on campus so **I promise to fight and turn this space into a new hub for students, introducing a facility with more microwaves, spaces and tables to eat your own lunch, bigger lockers for students to store luggage or instruments, sleeping/napping facilities for students commuting long distances to college and dedicated**

sensory and quiet zones. This is a big plan which would be the first of its kind, but I am experienced and dedicated enough to turn this into a reality for UL Students.

Student safety

Student safety has always been a concern for me, therefore I have run numerous different initiatives throughout the year. My biggest initiative has been the Wellbeing hub which is set up upon arrival before every courtyard event during Freshers' week and Charity week. At this hub I hand out Anti spiking cup covers and bottle tops, condoms, lube, and period products as well as supporting students if they need us. Another campaign I ran was all about drugs and alcohol from a harm reduction approach. This included a day in the courtyard with different informative services and support services. I also launched a social media campaign describing the effects, risks and what to expect of the different drugs people may explore.

Gambling is a huge problem in UL, and it is being seen as a concerning trend which is going unnoticed. This is why I hosted a gambling awareness talk with Oisín McConville which saw great engagement and I hope helped those who needed it. I want to continue to find ways to raise awareness about this issue and I will be hosting another day in the courtyard before student race day as this day has over 15,000 students in attendance at a gambling centred event.

Events

I want to continue to push for more inclusive and more meaningful events across campus. I want there to be even more events, that are free or at the most minimal cost. We have worked hard in getting at least one night of each courtyard event down to €15 but I want to push to get all events down to this price and quality of events maintained. I also want that there would be even more of a student input into the events being run on campus and artists that people want to see. To do this, I would host a student forum style event to discuss ideas, because after all, this is an event for students and it should be led by what you want. This year, I ran numerous events, either free or I ran the event at a loss. Students appreciated this and acknowledged the value of the events. I believe events hosted by the student's union should be run cost neutral or at a loss from the budgets which are there for these purposes.

Campaign success

I had numerous successful campaigns this year which I think made a strong impact on the community. Flourish fest was my first campaign of the year. This was a day where I gathered numerous different support services in the courtyard which were important for student welfare to excel in college. This was the first of its kind and I hope to leave this as a legacy for

my Welfare successor. Another initiative I started was Penis Power which was a men's mental and sexual health campaign week, encouraging an open dialogue between people about how they are doing, building a sense of community, and checking in on their friends. This campaign was a huge success for me where I actively engaged with over 200 students across my events. A similar campaign I recently ran was Viva La Vulva which again promoted open dialogue and positive and open conversations about sex. This has now become an annual campaign which actively sees the most engagement of the year when it comes to welfare campaigns.

Running meaningful events has been a highlight of my year, but through pushing for services to combat these issues I am trying to bring awareness to, has been the most meaningful to me.

All in all,

I hope that you can trust me to represent you and advocate for your needs as Student President within the university! I promise that if I am elected, my door will always be open and there will never be an issue too big or too small. Feel free to reach out if you have any further questions on Instagram @SiofraforPresident

Enjoy the St. Patrick's weekend!

Síofra

Issued by Richard Grimes, Campaign manager for Síofra Foley