



NUS-USI

the Student Movement in Northern Ireland

A BRIEF POLITICAL OVERVIEW

1972-2012

Foreword



It is a massive privilege to be President of NUS-USI during the time we are celebrating our 40th anniversary. We have much to celebrate and are renowned for efforts in ensuring fairness for students, our campaigns against injustice and our work to battle prejudice in all its forms.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all the Presidents, Convenors, Officers and staff down the years who have contributed so much, and in so many ways, to our rich, illustrious and diverse history.

I would also like to thank everyone who has joined in our events to celebrate our 40th anniversary.

Here's to enjoying the next forty years of success for students.

Adrienne Peltz

NUS-USI President

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A brief history of student unions in Northern Ireland

- Three representative societies founded 1896/97 in Queen's Universities, eventually becoming QUBSU in 1948
- QUBSU moved from where School of Music is today to a new purpose-built building opposite the main entrance to Queen's in 1967
- Student union formed from merger of three colleges including the Art College in 1973
- Student unions formed in the Ulster Polytechnic and the New University of Ulster
- Stranmillis Student Representatives' Council active in the 1960s with St Joseph's, St Mary's more involved later in the decade
- Rupert Stanley College in Tower Street, Belfast, and the College of Business Studies had student unions from the early 1970s and Belfast Technical College formed a Students' Association in 1960.

National Student Unions

National Union of Students (NUS)

- NUS UK formed in 1922, and by 1924 all university colleges in England were members
- After WWII training and technical colleges were allowed to join
- April 1969 NUS Conference changed clause three of its Constitution allowing NUS to have policies on everything from social and educational issues to wider political and international issues.
- The same conference elected Jack Straw as the first President from the left

Union of Students in Ireland (USI)

- USI was formed in 1959 replacing the Irish Students Association
- USIT formed
- Department recognised USI as the national body for recognising students in 1970

Student Unions in NI and the National Unions

- Stranmillis and QUB involved in formation of USI
- NUS did not allow members for Northern Ireland until after WWII, with QUB becoming the first from NI
- St Joseph's became first Catholic training college to join USI
- QUBSU disaffiliated from USI 1964
- NI Regional Committee of institutions of higher education formed in 1964
- By 1964, the other HE colleges in Northern Ireland, Belfast Art College, PE College and the Catering College had joined USI
- The NUU Students' Council was formed in 1970 and affiliated to USI along with the Ulster Polytechnic.
- By the emergence of the 'Polytech', as it was known, in 1973, the Student Union was affiliated to both National Unions, as was the Students Representatives Council at Coleraine.
- The situation was that the decision to join a National Union was not a straightforward tribal split, but rather had more to do with the services the National Unions provided and the financial implications associated with membership.

Issues for NUSUK and USI operating in the North

- The fact NUS had no office here was problematic as the law and political situation was different in some respects and NUS research department needed someone local to examine policy in the North.

- The context for the establishment of an office was the decision of NUS to appoint a number of regional 'field officers' to support union development. The size of Northern Ireland would have made it difficult to justify a full time field officer, but a cooperative venture with USI was viable.
- Problem of duplication of work as some institutions had USI lobbying at Stormont, while other institutions had NUS doing so
- Colleges would welcome not having to pay two separate affiliation fees
- NUS wanted to develop student unions and in particular further education colleges.
- Whatever practical issues student unions may have had to joining NUS or USI was surpassed by 1968-69 however, when membership of either a British or Irish National Union would take on religious, and subsequently political, connotations.

1969 and student unions

- Northern Ireland students, and their counterparts in France, England and America, among others, were making headlines all over the world. QUBSU officers and supporters now became much more than members of a sporting association. They were arguably, for the first time, a group of young political activists.
- As a result of the activity People's Democracy members in particular, inevitably Queen's students, whether the union wanted this or not, became associated with the Civil Rights Campaign which resulted in many unionists becoming 'suspicious' of the university.
- NUS rejected its no politics platform, therefore they discussed Northern Ireland at National Conference and awareness and activism increased.

With the practical disadvantages of two national unions operating in Northern Ireland now exacerbated by the political climate, it was clear that the onus lay on NUS and USI to come to some sort of an agreement on organising in the North.

One problem...The relationship between NUSUK and USI was extremely bad.

NUS and USI work together

- The cooperation between NUS and USI had fairly modest beginnings.
- A meeting between NUS and USI was held in February 1972 in which "a number of concrete decisions as to future cooperation were achieved". In 1972 agreement was reached jointly to fund an office and a part-time member of staff, and a commitment to unspecified future cooperation
- Late 1972 the final arrangements were in hand for the establishment of the Northern Ireland office which were to be jointly financed by USI and the NUS. The aim was to have a part-time member of staff which both unions hoped would increase the services available to their members in Northern Ireland
- The 1972 agreement is the first formal arrangement between the British and Irish National Unions. A British and an Irish organisation co-operating in Northern Ireland for the benefit of all students there, was certainly a revelation
- But, it was really the 1975 Galway meeting which started to make a difference. By then, NUS had adopted policies on civil rights issues in Northern Ireland, and there was a growing awareness in both organisations that action was needed to confront sectarianism. Again, there was no formal written agreement or signing ceremony, just an agreement to develop campaigning against sectarianism and to build the student movement.
- Agreement came on May 3rd 1975. Both national unions agreed that you couldn't be a member of one and not the other
- The two unions ran a very valuable campaign in 1974 on the theme "End Sectarianism; Build the Student Movement" which got widespread support
- 1978 saw the formation of SHAC, the Student Housing Association Co-operative

Ciarán Hanna

NUS-USI Convenors (Full-Time Sabbatical)

In the mid-eighties a motion was passed at annual conference that members would fund a full-time sabbatical convenor. Twenty years later the title of Convenor changed to President.

1987-88	Martin Magee	College of Business Studies
1988-89	Maxine Brady	Rupert Stanley College
1989-90	Damian Gough	College of Business Studies
1990-91	Shauneen Armstrong	College of Business Studies
1991-92	Richie Carruthers	BIFHE
1992-93	Paul McMenamin	QUB
1993-94	Gerard Green	QUB
1994-95	Gerard Green	QUB
1995-96	Denis Carson	BIFHE
1996-97	Denis Carson	BIFHE
1997-98	Nigel O'Connor	QUB
1998-99	Maurice Dickson	North Down & Ards Institute
1999-2000	Shane Whelehan	University of Ulster
2000-2001	Brian Slevin	QUB
2001-2002	Brian Slevin	QUB
2002-2003	Ben Archibald	QUB
2003-2004	Ben Archibald	QUB
2004-2005	Damien Kavanagh	QUB
2005-2006	Damien Kavanagh	QUB
2006-2007	Colleen Dowdall	University of Ulster
2007-2008	Katie Morgan	University of Ulster
2008-2009	Katie Morgan	University of Ulster
2009-2010	Ciarnan Helferty	QUB
2010-2011	Ciarnan Helferty	QUB
2011-2012	Adrienne Peltz	South Eastern Regional College

Here are some anecdotes from past Convenor/Presidents that we would like to share. Marty Magee was the first person elected to this position.

Marty Magee was the first person elected to this position.

In 1987 I was elected to the first salaried NUS-USI Regional Convenor post for Northern Ireland. Before this, I was President of Belfast College of Business Studies.

Well, from what I can remember there was great fun to be had during my term in office. **Student politics was in many respects a new and refreshing backdrop away from what we were all used to in Northern Ireland.** It was idealistic, care free and very much removed from the harsh realities of local life at that time. Many of the people I worked with then have moved on to better things whilst others became political representatives. My year with NUS-USI certainly gave me much confidence. Though, while I thought a term in office would lead to a burgeoning career, with a move to National Student politics, this was somewhat dashed when given as a present at my leaving party, a one way ticket to New York. Don't know what the intended message was there?

I have been working in local government for many years now, preferring to feed the politic rather than being part of it.

On reflection, a great personal journey was had over the time, with some memorable experiences and met some "interesting" people at National conferences. Other experiences are clearly not publishable, so I will leave those for another day.

**Marty Magee
1987-1988**





I suppose I was fairly naive when I put myself forward for election in 1991. Karen Quinlivan among others was to blame for me even considering the Convenor post. **There are some stark similarities today to what was going on in the North in my year as Convenor 1991-92 – recession was taking a grip once again, with unemployment at unprecedented levels since the 80's, the Tories were in power and hammering working class communities and the NHS.** Still it wasn't all bad Thatcher had resigned just a few short months previously and the Labour left was reenergising itself!

In the wee North, the student movement was playing a pivotal role in progressive campaigns North and South, from the Right to Information to Fair Employment. A tireless campaigner and friend of NUS-USI should be remembered in Oliver Kearney (RIP) who was a central figure in the campaign against the Northern Bank boycott for their discrimination against Catholics.

It was also in this year following a safe sex stall at Queen's that a few of us NUS-USI heads were arrested and interviewed by CID for alleged breaches of the Obscene Publications Act. Members of the Young Ulster Unionists at Queens were offended apparently at the depiction of the vague male form in relation to safe sex. There was a major hue and cry laid by Paisley and the usual suspects about 'Saving Ulster from Sodomy'. It probably backfired and invigorated student unions, LGBT campaigners and of course led to the customary national speaking tour by Peter Tatchell. The cops eventually (and reluctantly some might say) dropped the charges against us. It was some craic trying to explain what that was all about to Ma and Da following the press outrage!

My year in office was further peppered by marches, demos and occupations on student poverty. We also collaborated closely with NI-ICTU on the rather ambitiously named "Student Campaign for Peace ". We worked closely with Trade Unions and Community Organisations, this particular demo was very well attended and at one point there was a two minute deafening silence by marches outside the City Hall. We used a version of the iconic 'The Scream' by Edvard Munch and I understand it's still adorning the walls of some offices and flats to this day. NUS-USI members at the time were also targeted, on the 16th October 1992, 29 year old Queens Law student and mother of a ten year old boy, Sheena Campbell, was murdered by the UVF as she sat with friends in the bar of the York Hotel.

The student movement during this time was a true collective effort, predicated on solidarity and social progress. The craic was good and personally speaking I learned more than I probably contributed, however, the student movement at this time was vibrant, proactive, engaged and socially responsive. I'm glad that I saw at first hand its value. Thankfully our society has moved on significantly and the major dividend of the peace process is that citizens can go about the daily life in a "normal" way.

"Every action of our lives touches on some chord that will vibrate in eternity."
- Sean O'Casey

**Richy Carrothers
1991-1992**



I will always feel honoured and extremely privileged to have been Regional Convenor of NUS-USI and President of Queen's Students Union during one of the most historic and momentous periods in the history of the North of Ireland. I became NUS-USI Convenor in June 1992 and it was already evident to everyone in Northern Ireland that we were perhaps beginning to see the flickerings of the light at the end of the tunnel as far as the impasse between our political representatives and the respective warring factions were concerned. Talks leading up to the ground breaking Downing Street Declaration were ongoing and **the**

student movement was, as always, at the forefront in attempting to promote a peaceful way forward for all parties concerned as well as a new beginning for all the people on the island of Ireland.

This is not to suggest that the student body was one cohesive block, with a singular viewpoint on the correct way to proceed. Like all institutions in the North it was not immune to the latent, not always unspoken, sectarianism that permeated so many aspects of society. Queen's Students Union in particular was viewed by many sections of the Unionist establishment as a bastion of Republicanism whilst Queen's University's tradition of playing the British National Anthem at graduation ceremonies was viewed as an affront by many Nationalist students. QUBSU's policy of displaying the Irish Language on signage throughout the building was viewed by many Unionist students as blatant 'territory marking', while the presence of the RUC band at Graduation was viewed with similar disdain by Nationalists. In short the student body was in many ways a microcosm of the society it inhabited.

Attempting to straddle this divide was NUS-USI. It will always be my firm belief that I was a different President (than I perhaps may have been) due to the year I spent beforehand as Convenor of NUS-USI in the almost daily company of Pete O'Neill. Pete was running NUS-USI then (in truth, back then, he and Laura kind of were NUS-USI) and truly saw every side of every story while still maintaining his own convictions. As a Catholic Nationalist from Derry I hadn't spent much time attempting to understand the political beliefs, needs or interests of my Unionist counterparts and in truth had spent very little time in their company. Like the majority of Northern students my arrival at Queen's University heralded my first taste of integrated education and to be fair I was much more interested in this new integration of the sexes than any integration of religious or political beliefs. What I learned from Pete however was that if we were to succeed in and contribute to a new future for Northern Ireland then we had to do it as much as possible as a Union of all Students, regardless of race, sex, political persuasion, religious belief or sexual preference.

In this context my year as Convenor was an eye opener in many ways. For the first time i got to chat one on one with staunchly Unionist student leaders from rural Fermanagh and staunchly Republican student leaders from South Armagh. I also had long insightful conversations with student leaders from London who didn't know why we just couldn't all get along as well as long insightful conversations with student leaders from Dublin who, to my dismay, also wondered why we couldn't all just get along!!! As my year as Convenor progressed i came to realize the now accepted adage that we did in truth have more to unite us than divide us.

This is at the heart of the importance of NUS-USI.....**as an organization it straddles divides, builds bridges, promotes understanding and provokes thought and dialogue....I will always be extremely proud of the time I got to spend there and thankful for the lessons I learned.**

Congratulations to NUS-USI on your 40th Birthday....Keep fighting the good fight!!!

**Paul Mc Menamin
1992-1993**



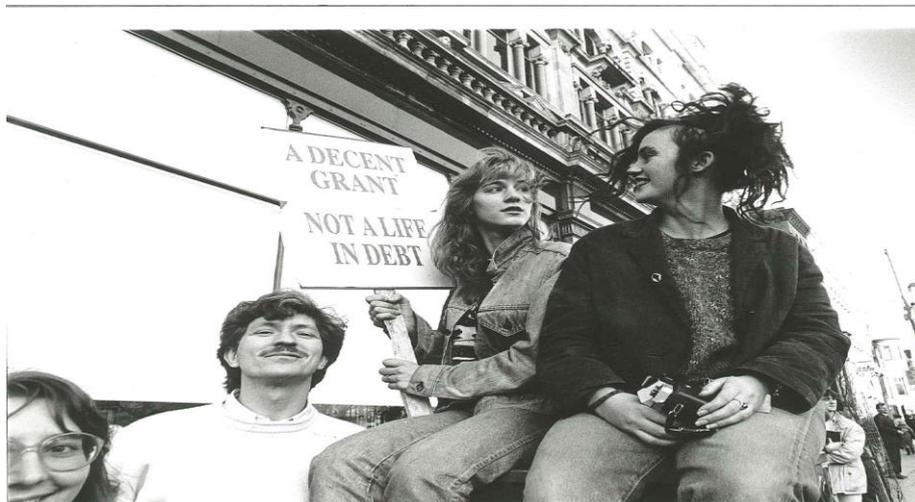
My time as convenor I feel was dominated by the work done with the further education colleges which I felt for a number of years previously had been neglected by NUS-USI to a certain degree, the union being dominated by the big universities. Most of the FE colleges were visited by myself and their structures, or lack of them, were revamped and, where necessary, new union structures set up. Examples of this work were the colleges of Ballymena where I came across Mr Hanna. That was to prove worthwhile in the long term as we became not only union colleagues but firm friends, and the North Down Institute in Bangor which, prior to my visit and work there with the students, no student union had existed.

My memories of this period include the craic we had at NUS conference in the Winter Gardens in Blackpool, NUS-USI conference at Ballycastle and USI congress in Wexford. Those were good times which I thoroughly enjoyed and still remember fondly.

On the political front I feel I must include in any memories of my time with NUS-USI as Regional Convenor; my opposition to NUS and the new labour section in the national union that voted on the withdrawal of support for the campaign for free education. This battle within the union was, at times, bitterly fought and politically challenging for myself and our members in the north of Ireland. I had the opportunity to speak on the platform at the London protest march to Greenpark in London which thousands of students attended as well as at National Conference in Blackpool. Both were well received.

I look back at my time as NUS-USI Convenor and the memories make me laugh. **I learnt a lot about politics on the ground, and how to deal with fellow union members' problems, as the training I was given for the post of Convenor was really grounding.** This has helped me immensely in my current post with BCC/NIHE as a neighbourhood officer working in the inner city, and as a current rep for NIPSA in my work place.

Dennis Carson
1995-1997



I was Acting Convenor from April to June 1998. Generally this would be a quiet time for the unions but of course this was the period after the Good Friday Agreement had been signed and I was responsible for co-ordinating the campaign for the YES vote.



I attended press conferences and events ran by Quentin Oliver's YES campaign. We sent off press releases and I chaired political debates in the Art College and our own events. I also attended USI National Council as NUS-USI Convenor and made a speech in the debate for USI to support the YES campaign, which was passed.

That period of involvement as Convenor was an experience in so many ways. **I found what I could and couldn't do, what I should have and shouldn't have done, how to work on your own and in a team, to think under pressure and make the right decisions.** Along the way I made mistakes, but I hope I've learned from them and above all, I have met wonderful people, and great friends, especially with the staff and former officers of NUS-USI - an enriching experience indeed. To NUS-USI I have to say simply: Thank you.

**Ciarán Hanna (aka Mr Hanna)
Acting NUS-USI Convenor
April-June 1998**

I entered the student union movement in 1996 by developing North Down & Ards Institute student union and getting the first ever sabbatical President. I never thought of going for Convenor but, after attending many USI events and NUS Conference, as well as having some drunken chats along the way, I decided go for it. I was elected for 1998-1999 - though as an unusual candidate coming from a protestant background.

I must say that being Convenor of NUS-USI is one of my proudest achievements. **To have a say on USI officer board and travel round Ireland whilst, in parallel, sitting on the NUS Executive and heading to London meetings, did seem like two worlds apart, and were equally as enjoyable.**

What have I learnt from my experiences? - never send a fax out when you are in Westport, vegetarian food blocks up the sink when you have had too much to drink and clogs on your feet aren't very comfortable - but, on a serious note, this role gave me great experience and skills to help me to become who I am today. I recommend it to anyone. What we were best at was organising and undertaking FE visits to support the sector at the time. We achieved a lot of different things (Copies of our executive report are still available!)

Hard to believe that was in NUS-USI's 26th year and now we are celebrating its 40th. I wish NUS-USI continued success and may I personally thank the current and past staff and elected members for continued service to the organisation and to its future success.

**Maurice Dickson
1998-1999**



In June 2002, NUS-USI elected me Convenor. Having previously promised NUS and USI that my prior election as Deputy Convenor would absolutely, definitely not result in me taking up a seat as the first card carrying Tory on the USI Officer Board since the founding President (!) and on the NUS National Executive in sixteen years, my then outgoing predecessor had a lot of consolation drinks to buy that night.

2002 was the year the Assembly committed seppuku – then Director Peter o’Neill and I watched at a conference in Armagh as minister Carmel Hanna explained the likely end of the executive was just a phone

call away. With that, Direct Rule was returned to Northern Ireland.

Every convenor in modern times takes a decision how to balance the relationship between NUSUK and USI. USI was engaged in the fight against fees specifically in Ireland, whilst the situation in Northern Ireland was perhaps more fully grasped by NUS. As a result, we engaged wholeheartedly in the UK campaign to defeat the prospect of top-up fees with always the slight concern that a New Labour dominated NUS would go easy on the government. So it was to prove. The sell-out was on. It was my constant pleasure to remind NEC colleagues that only the Conservatives were then committed to ending student fees.

The decision to ‘streamline’ further & higher education colleges in Northern Ireland was well advanced in 2002 to 2004 – along with this came the prospect of the agricultural colleges’ merger with their local FHE college. Students at Loughry College weren’t having any of it, and we engaged in a lobbying plan to highlight the undesirability of the proposal, and propose alternative courses of action.

This resulted in a great deal of lobbying in Stormont and around the country. **I am reliably informed that I’m the first elected Conservative Party member to visit Sinn Féin in their own offices since Douglas Hurd in the 1980s.**

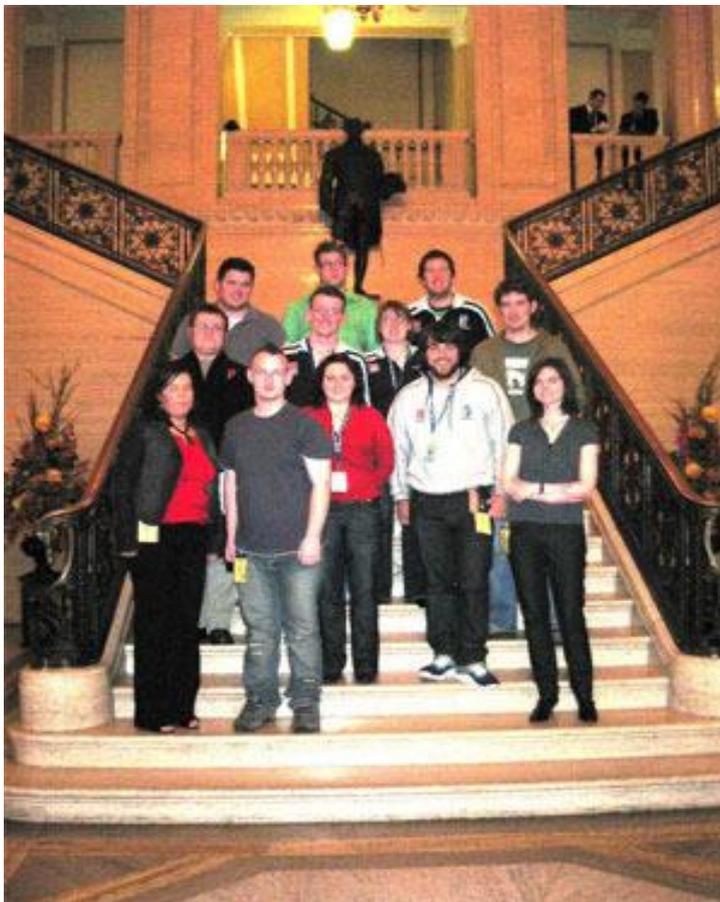
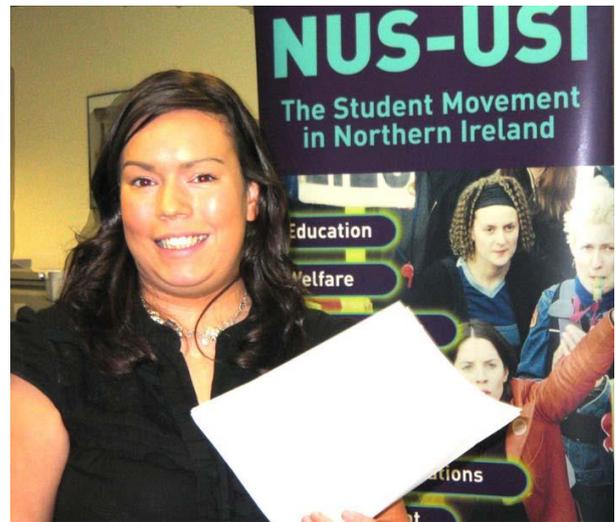
The comedy of Michelle Gildernew and Barry McElduff trying to guess, over a cup of tea in Dungannon, which party I was a member of was matched only by the kick administered to my shin under a Stormont desk when a discussion with Sinn Féin members of the Agriculture committee on horses being traded to the continent for meat was met with a polite enquiry on whether anyone around the table had heard of Shergar.

After two terms in Belfast, including a great affiliation referendum at University of Ulster, the Union of Students in Ireland elected me President. I was distraught to leave the friendly certainties of Northern Ireland for the South, where a financial crisis was tearing the very heart out of the union. One of my last decisions as Northern Ireland’s representative on the Officer Board was to vote for the sacking of all but two of my colleagues - including my girlfriend.

**Ben Archibald
2002-2004**

In September 2006 top-up fees were introduced in Northern Ireland. Students were faced with huge debt to fund their way through third level education. My time as Convenor was a busy year: coming from University of Ulster as Vice President Magee and Overall President I was very aware of the work that had to be done in lobbying on behalf of the Students in Northern Ireland.

We had an extremely successful rally in London on October 29th 2006 as part of the national campaign.



In 2006-2007 NUS-USI worked hard on the 'Admission Impossible' campaign which called for 'No to soaring levels of student debt, No to any attempt to lift the Cap, No to the marketisation of education and Yes to free education and access for all'. Colleges both Higher and Further became involved in the campaign and we held a number of Question and Answer sessions in Stormont as well as various other campaigns.

During my time as Convenor I worked on the development of further education student unions along with staff member Jill McGrath. During this time we have seen a lot more further education colleges investing in the development of these unions.

I have many memories from my time in NUS-USI. It was great to work with such inspiring and strong people.

I wish NUS-USI the very best in the future.

Colleen Dowdall

2006-2007

My name is Katie Morgan and I was the NUS-USI Convenor 2007-08 and the NUS-USI President 2008-09. Yes, I was the one who was mandated and fought to change the title to



President after years of Convenors having to explain what our role is, not only to NUSUK Officers, or USI affiliates, but to presidents, the media and of course students. I feel that this assisted in clarifying the role to everyone, and certainly made the role easier, especially in relation to media as it contributed to NUS-USI getting more media coverage, as we found the name change led to an increase in quotes and interviews, which was great.

I thoroughly enjoyed my two years in position, and experienced a lot of highs and lows of the job. Fresher

Fairs were always a favourite of mine as you got to meet students one to one, and explain to them how they were part of the bigger picture.

One of my favourite achievements was on the 19th November 2007 when I led students to the steps of Stormont where we protested against the proposed increase in tuition fees, as part of NUS-USI's Access to Education campaign. Hundreds of students attended, not only locally but from the South of Ireland and parts of the UK. We got a

warm response from some political parties who came out and addressed the crowds along with media coverage. It was extremely effective as it got the NUS-USI President a seat on the Review panel and gave us the opportunity to feed in to the review of Tuition Fees in Northern Ireland, as well as a freeze on fees until the Review was complete. A negative but quite humorous part of that day was that I wrote my car off leaving the NUS-USI office to get to the protest and during the commotion had to do a radio interview with Frank Mitchell whilst sitting in the back of the written off car in the middle of the Dublin Road.

Another high point was winning the most contested election in the history of NUS-USI. I was quite proud that in my second year four people had nominated for the NUS-USI President position, which made me feel that we had done a great job in promoting NUS-USI throughout our affiliates. Unfortunately one person dropped out which left it to three of us in the Hustings but it was a great experience and when the vote came in I was delighted.

I am happy to say that I lived up to my manifesto pledges, including a detailed Constitutional Review and Policy Review which assisted future Presidents in carrying out their job. I went straight from my position as NUS-USI President to Union Organiser in a Trade Union in Melbourne, Australia, which I have been doing for almost 3 years now. I am grateful for having the opportunity to be involved in some of the most amazing experiences I've ever had. I am honoured to be a lifetime member of NUS-USI, I made some great friendships during the two years and loved how well the NUS-USI staff and executive worked together. I would do it all again in a heartbeat. I am proud that we've made it 40 years, and I look forward to seeing the good work that NUS-USI will do for the next 40 years.



Katie Morgan

2007-2009

1972 NUS-USI - FIRST PROTOCOL AGREEMENT

.....apart from this historic signing, some other world events occurred, including:-

30 January	Bloody Sunday
2 March	USA Pioneer 10 unmanned spacecraft launched a 21 month journey to Jupiter
22 March	US Senate passed Equal Rights Amendment
24 March	Direct rule imposed on Northern Ireland
6 August	Idi Amin expelled 50,000 Asians with British passports from Uganda
11 August	the last US Ground Forces withdrew from Vietnam
31 August	US swimmer, Mark Spitz brings his gold medal total to four in Munich
3 October	Nixon signs a mutual agreement with the USSR to limit nuclear weapons
25 December	Nicaraguan earthquake hits the capital Managua killing 100,000

