

**EQU
ALITY**

**VOTE KATIE
EQUALITY OFFICER 2018**

#KatieforEQO





University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



Katie Browne O'Neill

Manifesto

Equality Officer

2018/19



About

Hey! My name is Katie Browne O'Neill and I'm running to be your Equality Officer on the UCC Students Union for 2018/19.

Coming into the 1st Year of an Arts degree, I was told of hours and hours of free time - to nap, sesh, socialise... and, then nap some more. Unfortunately, that dream never became a reality as I threw myself into student life (for better or for worse), being elected as Sociology Class Rep within the first couple of weeks of Semester 1. Since then I've become an active member of the UCC Student Council, LGBTQ+ Society Committee and contributed articles to both the UCC Express and Motley Magazine.

Outside of UCC, I spend a majority of time volunteering, advocating for and writing about topics such as mental health, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ issues and more. I've always had a commitment to issues of social justice and equality as it's a topic close to my heart - first beginning with becoming an active member of my local LGBTQ+ group.

Since then I've been lucky enough to spend the last two years working with SpunOut.ie as part of their Action Panel, creating campaigns addressing the issues facing young people in Ireland today, between the ages of 16 and 25. Within my local community I advocate for access to Mental Health First Aid Training for members of the community with local charity Community Minds, by taking on the role of volunteer liaison and managing the organisations social media.

Since moving to Cork I've also become an active member of Gender Rebels Cork, having become a member of the organisations steering group earlier this year, we aim to provide a support group and safe space, in addition to advocating for members of the transgender and non-binary community here in Cork City.



Why Vote for Me?

Entering university life, whether post-leaving cert, as a visiting student or returning to education as a mature student, can be equal parts an incredibly exciting and daunting experience. As a student with a disability, mental health issue, or a member of a social minority (such as the LGBTQ+ community) this can add an additional challenge of trying to gauge how accepting, adaptable and open minded the university is. As Equality Officer I will work with the Students Union and other services within UCC to ensure that every student will have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential regardless of background or ability in addition to ensuring that every student entering the gates of UCC will feel secure in the knowledge that this is the case.

As Equality Officer I want to work hard to ensure the Equality Officer & Equality Working Group Officers are significantly more visible around UCC. I want students to know who they can go to, what their role is and how they can contribute to making UCC a more equal and fairer place!

UCC is incredibly lucky to have such a diverse student population. I believe that each and every student in UCC has something special to contribute to our community. I plan to work in conjunction with the SU Welfare Officer that all students, regardless of ability or background, are presented with equal opportunities to reach their full academic and social potential in a supportive and non-judgemental environment that embraces the diversity of our student community.

Gender Equality

Sexual Harassment

In the light of recent revelations within the media regarding sexual harassment and assault there has been a greater conversation and discussion around the issue within UCC. Following Consent Week, organised by UCC Feminist Society, and having conversations with other students, and my own personal experiences, as Equality Officer, I would like to work towards introducing mandatory consent classes during student orientation, in addition to improving and highlighting the current reporting system in place to protect students who come forward regarding experiences of sexual assault and harassment.

LGBTQ+

Gender Recognition

As a queer student at UCC I have seen first hand the difficulties transgender people face when wishing to amend their student identification to accurately represent their identity, this can present added difficulty when it comes to interacting with academic faculty, transcripts and so on. The UCC Policy on Gender Expression has been in the works for the past two years and as Equality Officer I aim to work toward ensuring that the policy is enacted before then end of the academic year 2018/19. I will also work with the SU and respective university bodies to ensure greater access to gender neutral bathrooms and changing areas on all UCC Campuses.



Targeted Harassment

The current Duty of Respect & Right to Dignity Policy at UCC does not currently contain any provisions in the case of the targeted harassment, bullying and discrimination of students from social minorities. Earlier this year I presented a motion, passed by SU Student Council to amend this policy to include such provisions.

As Equality Officer I will work with the SU Welfare Officer to ensure this amendment is brought to fruition, implemented and reporting process highlighted to all students in order to ensure that UCC works to continue to be as safe a university as possible for those from social minorities.

Mental Health

Training & Workshops

It's been shown that students at third level are more vulnerable to experiencing mental health issues. We are lucky at UCC to have amazing services such as Niteline, a free Student Counselling service and a Welfare Officer students can contact should they need somebody to talk to during hard times. There has also been a huge emphasis on opening up to friends, and talking openly about our mental health experiences and issues, what I feel we've failed to do is provide support in the case you find yourself in the position of having to support a friend experiencing mental health issues.

As a trained Mental Health First Aider, I cannot stress how incredibly valuable having a foundation you can work off of should a friend or fellow student find themselves in crisis or

experiencing an ongoing mental health issue. As Equality Officer, I will work with the SU Welfare Officer as well as Student Counselling Service to develop and provide informal workshops, beginning with students in positions of leadership (All SU Officers, Peer Support Leaders, Class Reps) and then the wider student community, to provide individuals with the skills and information needed to provide support when it comes to mental health.



Disability Support Service

Accessible Campus

We can't deny the beautiful campus we have here at UCC but, as a student with a physical disability it can provide additional obstacles that can pose risks and prevent getting to lectures on time, this is especially true for students attending labs, visiting academic offices outside of main campus or negotiating the heritage campus.

As Equality Officer, I will work with the Disability Support Service to ensure all UCC Campuses are continually being developed to ensure greatest accessibility to students - from sufficient lighting on campus, to the prompt repairing of lifts.

Quiet Space

With a community of over 20,000 students UCC Campus can become an incredibly busy place! This is especially the case during weeks such as Freshers and Raise & Give Week. Understandably this can prove to be incredibly uncomfortable and sometimes distressing for students who experience mental health or sensory issues.

As Equality Officer, I will work with the SU and Disability Support Service to create and provide a calm space that all students can access, specifically to destress, relax and remove themselves for the hecticness of campus should they feel the need.

Mature Students

Integration

As an early school leaver, I can appreciate how challenging the transition back to education can be, this is even more pronounced when attending a university as large as UCC. As a mature student with additional responsibilities compared to younger students, it can prove difficult to get

involved in other aspects associated with being a student. Integration continues to be a huge issue when it comes to Mature Students, it is hoped that this is somewhat eased with the opening of the new Student Hub which will see all student services in one space, including the Mature Student Common Room but, it is my belief more can be done in conjunction with Mature Students themselves to ensure that you feel included within student life at UCC.



As Equality Officer I will work with the SU, as well as Clubs & Societies, to ensure that events, campaigns and other opportunities presented in student life are inclusive of and accessible to mature students.

International Students

Inclusivity

Moving to a new country, adapting to a new culture and attending a university as big as UCC can prove to be incredibly intimidating for some international students. I believe it is our responsibility, as the Students Union, Clubs & Societies and Student Leaders, to ensure that this transition is as welcoming, comfortable, and accommodating as possible for International Students.

As Equality Officer I will work with visiting students and the wider student body to ensure that UCC is as welcoming and accommodating as we pride ourselves to be, in addition to encouraging students to get involved with the bustling student life, clubs and, societies here at UCC!

On an individual level I am a huge believer in *actions speaking louder than words* and this is a work ethic I'm determined to bring to the role of Equality Officer. I want to make concrete change, I want to be active, I want to be visible - but most importantly, I want to work with YOU to make that happen!

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March 6th & 7th 2018
#KatieforEQO #Puttingthetalkintoequalitea