

VOTE/VÓTAÍL

AMY SMITH

FOR NUS-USI PRESIDENT



Hi everyone, my name is Amy Smith (she/her), and I am the current President of Queen's Students' Union. Today, I'm asking for your support as I run to be the next President of NUS-USI.

During my time as QSU President, I have worked tirelessly to put students first by strengthening representation, improving communication between students and university leadership, and ensuring that student voices are at the heart of decision-making. I have led campaigns focused on student wellbeing and academic support, pushed for meaningful policy change, and worked to make our Union more transparent, inclusive, and accountable.

Now, I'm ready to take that experience forward and fight for students nationally.

Accessible Education and Opportunities

Further Education, EMA and Students' Union Autonomy

Further education colleges must not be treated as an afterthought in national funding decisions. I will push for a **fundamental review of student financial support** in further education, including **EMA** (Educational Maintenance Allowance), so that it genuinely keeps pace with rising living costs and works for students today. We need to rethink **how FE support is designed**, not simply adjust outdated thresholds.

I will campaign for stronger and more accessible **FE hardship and grant support**, and ensure the government prioritises further education in wider funding reform. FE students' unions must be able to operate independently and act autonomously as the voice of their students, free to advocate, campaign, and hold institutions to account.

Apprenticeships

Education should open doors, and for too many students in Northern Ireland, it still depends on background or support. As NUS-USI President, I will champion apprenticeships and further education as **equal, respected pathways**. We represent over 130,000 students and apprentices across further and higher education, yet participation still does not reflect the **diversity of our student population**.

Apprenticeships must be accessible, clearly understood, and genuinely empowering. Apprentices must be treated as **workers and learners**, not cheap labour. **Women remain underrepresented** in construction and engineering, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional learning needs still face barriers to high-quality apprenticeship opportunities. Too many students learn about apprenticeships after subject choices have limited their options, and many lack clear information about progression, salary potential, and long-term opportunity.

I will push for **targeted outreach to widen participation, inclusive employer training, proper additional learning support funding, flexible apprenticeship models, meaningful career guidance, and stronger employer engagement in schools and colleges**. I will fight for clear progression maps from Level 2 through to Higher Level and degree study, stronger bridging routes into university, and transparent salary progression information. Apprenticeships **are not a second option**; they are a powerful route to success, and I will ensure students have the confidence and clarity to choose them.

Widening Participation Across Northern Ireland

Where you're from should not decide how far you go. But across Northern Ireland, it still does. Widening participation will not be a buzzword, it will be a priority. Education should break cycles, not reinforce them.

Too many students are told that further or higher education isn't for "people like them". If you're from a working-class background, rural community, care-experienced, disabled, or from a minority ethnic background, **the barriers are still real**. Getting in is only half the battle; staying, succeeding, and belonging is the real challenge.

I will fight for **financial support** that reflects real living costs. Maintenance support must match rent, transport, and bills. **Commuter students and those living independently** cannot be overlooked. I will push institutions to build real **partnerships** with underrepresented schools and communities, and ensure students see people like them in these spaces.

Widening participation is about success: **proper mental health services, accessible learning environments, strong academic support, and student voice at decision-making tables**. I will ensure Northern Ireland has a strong voice on **liberation issues** and challenge **racism and transphobia** wherever they appear. Every student deserves not just a place in education, but a fair chance to thrive.

Student Cost of Living

Too many students in Northern Ireland are in **survival mode** by skipping meals, limiting heating, and relying on emergency support. Food banks and vouchers cannot be the long-term plan for student life.

As NUS-USI President, I will move us **from crisis response to structural change**. I will campaign for sustained funding for campus food programmes, expanded and accessible hardship funds, and increased maintenance support that reflects the real cost of rent, energy, transport, and food. **International students** must be protected from housing exploitation, unfair employment practices, and additional financial pressures linked to visa restrictions.

I will work to **secure affordable catering, expanded free meal initiatives, subsidised transport, and warm study spaces**. Students on **placement, including nursing and midwifery students**, must be properly supported. **Student poverty** must remain central in political conversations. Students deserve stability, dignity, and the ability to focus on their education without constant financial stress.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls is systemic. Nearly **98% of women in Northern Ireland** report experiencing at least one form of violence or abuse in their lifetime. Students deserve to **feel safe** in their accommodation, classrooms, and social spaces.

Students' Unions across Northern Ireland have stepped up with initiatives like **Green Dot training and the Charter to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls**. But this work cannot stop there.

As NUS-USI President, I will ensure student representatives shape our approach and engage partners beyond campus to improve safety. I will push for mandatory consent and bystander education, properly funded trauma-informed support services, accessible reporting systems, and real institutional accountability. Tackling gender-based violence must be embedded across further and higher education.

Safety is not optional - it is a right, and as President, I will make it a priority every single day.