



## Student Officer Report - Welfare – Ciarán O'Brien

*March/April*

### Housing:

- The Student Renters Group continued to carry out weekly door knocks of student rental areas in an effort to educate students about their rights until the advent of COVID-19
- After the imposition of lockdown and the collapse of the hospitality industry many students began to leave their rental homes in Belfast to self-isolate at their family homes – from the SRG decided to initiate a food drive and activists went door to door collecting donations that students made after an appeal from the SRG to leave (if possible) any food or cleaning supplies behind to be donated to local foodbanks
- The SRG in March created its own social media channels which gained immense traction during the initial period of lockdown, garnering over 700 page likes in 2 weeks
- Acted as an intermediate between students and Queen's Accommodation on property disputes that arose weeks into lockdown concerning possessions of students being removed from rooms and thrown out without notice and before students could collect their things
- Successfully lobbied Student Roost with NUS-USI to allow students early contract termination

- The SRG were quick to identify contradictions emerging in housing due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and began a campaign for a rent suspension, rent freeze, eviction ban, and penalty free early contract termination
- The SRG informed NUS-USIs demands
- SRG collected case studies of individual students to be used for NUS-USIs MLA lobbying packs
- SRG created multiple letter templates that were successfully used to lobby MLAs and councillors and additionally the department for Communities Committee
- Successfully submitted a motion to NUS-USI to mandate it to support the establishment and growth of tenants unions like the SRG across Ireland
- Met via zoom with ACORN (a prominent tenants union in England) to learn about the steps they are taking to organise a rent strike and achieve their goals
- SRG continues to organise tenants during lockdown to argue for early contract termination and rent reduction through means of collective bargaining and rent strikes
- SRG is in talks with CATU the all-Ireland community tenants union about formally tying in with them as a collective organisation
- Since lockdown have dealt with a severely intense load of case work relating to housing and food poverty

#### Mental Health:

- Planned and organised the Wellfest – Buck the Stigma fundraiser event for PIPs suicide intervention that was sponsored by various student friendly outlets (cancelled due to COVID)
- Successfully hosted a SuicideTalk Workshop as part of wellfest which was attended by a number of staff and students: this workshop discussed suicide in the community, how to confront it, how to spot it and how to navigate conversations about suicide
- Discussed with company My-Potential who focus on tackling anxiety with students about a potential partnership and collaboration in preparation for exam time (delayed due to COVID)

#### Sexual Health:

- Organised and planned a second World Record STI test day event with sponsorship from Boojum (cancelled due to nursing shortages caused by COVID)
- Organised a Sex Positivity Workshop hosted by Common Youth with the objective of creating discussions and furthering action points in order to create a sex positivity campaign next year on campus
- Successfully hosted a Sex Quiz in a near to capacity speakeasy with sponsorship from boojum, Mystic (local sexy time shop), alongside live music performance from Sean Og
- Promoted the SH24 gum clinic amid lockdown which allows students to access STI test kits and contraception by mail

Other:

- Marched in the International Women's Day Rally student contingent
- Attended the various events over the 4 days of QUBs first Féile Mac Arthur
- Supported our staff and students on the UCU picket line for numerous weeks
- Once again attended the Student Support Fund Committee to make the case that the strike money be diverted into the support fund and what measures are QUB doing to keep up with rising demand for the fund
- Attended CAGs Divestment Rally at the Lanyon
- Attended the digital SU awards
- Worked with Volunteer SU to word their give back programme to appropriately reflect the potential benefits it could have to students suffering with mental health issues
- Participated in a Live Q&A with International students to answer their queries on welfare related issues caused by COVID
- NUS-USI Conference
- With help from Debbie of Advice SU we successfully partnered QUB SU as a referral partner to more of the local Food banks in Belfast so students don't have to come to south Belfast for access to one
- Successfully aligned QUB SU with PPRs campaign for universal free wifi during COVID