

# Lesley Barrett Manifesto for position of TU Dublin SU President 2022-2023

## Who is Lesley?

I am a sole parent to an 8-year-old daughter. I have a first-class honours Degree in Applied Social Care. I am German born, to an American Father & Irish Mother. I am both 5<sup>th</sup> generation Italian and 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Cherokee Indian. Which makes for quite a cultural mix!

But, most importantly in relation to this position, I am the current Deputy President of the Students' Union having previously been the Welfare & Equality VP for Tallaght Campus. Why is that important? Let's elaborate in,

## My Experience:

- ***4 years as a class rep while studying my degree***
- ***1<sup>st</sup> ever School rep for Business & Humanities on Tallaght Campus***
- ***Awarded overall student activist of the year by TU Dublin SU in 2020***

This means I have real meaningful experience of issues facing students and our elected student reps and can use that experience to enrich training and support for this cohort who play a massively important role in the union. It also shows that I was active in representing student issues and fighting for student rights even before my 1<sup>st</sup> election.

- ***Vice President for Welfare & Equality 2020-2021***

Being a VP gave me much experience and a deeper understanding of not only how the union works but how the university works. I ran successful campaigns on Disability Awareness, Mental Health, and Sexual Health. One of my favourite projects I was involved in was being involved in TU Dublin's Race Equity Working Group. Some of the ideas I put forward here are still being actioned and will benefit students for many years to come. One such project that arose from the working group was the inclusive library project which was recently formally launched by President FitzPatrick and will see print and art works from authors across a wider spectrum.

- ***Deputy President TU Dublin Student Union 2021-2022***

Being deputy president means I have worked very closely with the current President on a number of issues facing students across TU Dublin. One of the biggest issues that faced students this year was the January exam session. I put together a survey which over 6000 students responded to in one day, which asked students in light of the covid situation at the time if they wanted exams to be in person or online. I collected and collated this data so it could be presented to the relevant committees and boards. When we were ignored and the covid situation worsened over Christmas, I worked with the president while both of us were on annual leave to answer student queries and, put another formal request to the university to move to online as students fear sitting exams in exam halls. When the University listened and moved exams online or deferred them, I felt the same sense of relief that students felt.

A big aspect of my role is sitting on boards and committees at the highest levels representing student issues, and meeting with the university lead team regularly to discuss issues and topics that arise. I have a seat on Governing body which is the highest decision-making body in the University. I have also been actively involved in the strategic planning subcommittee and the strategic planning for the University, which will be beneficial to students for many years to come.

I also regularly attend meetings with the Deputy president of the college and other heads of functions with the SU President and have built good relationships and rapport with these people, which would make for a smooth transition and benefit students as I can build on these relationships going forward. I have also been acting for the president when he is unavailable in attending meetings etc. and, leading the SU team so I fully understand the duties, obligations required in the role and believe I have the necessary skillset to fulfil it.

## But why vote for me?

You might be thinking, ok she's definitely got the skills, understanding and experience required to fulfil the role of President, but are there other reasons I should vote for her?

**Yes!** There's plenty but I'll outline just some of them here.

- ***Engagement***

We as a union represent roughly 29k students and yet we have seen poor levels of engagement. This to a certain extent is to be expected as our Union has undergone massive changes in recent years. But it's not good enough. I am so passionate about not just speaking about what students want, but getting students involved and having them say what they want and need. Because of my previous union experience I am ready to hit the ground running if elected. Returning to campus in September was difficult to plan for because we had such uncertainty around Covid. Thankfully we are in a much better place in that regards now so can better plan. I plan on using the summer months to organise and train the team and plan for the year as best we can. I want everything that can be sorted by September done so officers can be on the ground with students when they start / return to college. With lots of events and activities. I want students to rekindle relationships with the union by giving them so many opportunities to see us and get involved that it's difficult not to. I mentioned above about having a cultural mix, I want to see us plan events and activities both on campus and off that provide a range of opportunities and experiences for students from all cohorts. The more students we reach through events and activities, the more students will know the union and engage with us in the other areas of work we do. It is this engagement that is so important to make sure students and their needs are really at the forefront of everything we do.

- ***Developing Partnership with TU Dublin***

This is really important for students. We are an independent autonomous body from the university and yes there are many times we have to raise issues and disagree with them. That's not likely to ever change given the nature of what a union is there for. However, it is in the best interest of students that we continue work on building partnerships with the university. In simple terms, it's no use us having a seat at the table if we're not listened to when we're there. By working to secure a relationship of mutual respect and parity of esteem, something I have started work on with the president this year, it increases our opportunities to raise issues and more importantly to be heard. As my nanny would have said "You catch more flies with honey than vinegar".

- ***TU Dublin Student Union Development***

As a Students' Union we represent almost 29 thousand students from over 200 countries across multiple disciplines and campuses. We must strive to adapt the Students' Union to ensure it is representing all our members. This year we will conduct a review of the constitution. Some very good changes were suggested in areas of the constitution. However, I spoke against it being put to referendum because a big change suggested was to the elected officer structure. I could not wholeheartedly stand over such a large suggested change when this had not been brought to us by students in the first instance or, had significant numbers of students involved in the consultation process.

As a union fully operational under one funding stream 2021-2022 is our first year in operation on the ground. I felt strongly that the changes to the structures that were put forward were being done so hastily, based on operations during Covid (online) and that there had not been significant student involvement to stand over such a big change. It is imperative that students are not just involved in any such major change to their union but that they are leading these changes. If elected I plan to continue the work of the constitutional working group by expanding its membership and reviewing the processes required to bring forward major changes. As mentioned above I believe by increasing involvement and participation from more student cohorts we can then conduct a variety of focus groups, surveys and student forums to listen to what changes our students want to see in the officer structure. Let me be very clear, I am not against change, change is important for any organisation to survive and adapt, however this change must be brought about by student needs and wants, not what we assume to be needed or wanted.

- ***My core values and beliefs***

I studied social care because I have a certain core values; respect, meaningful engagement, meaningful participation, inclusion, equality and equity (to name a few). I bring these values to my work on a daily basis and pride myself on always trying to think of ways to be more inclusive. Further, I believe the work of the union, aligns with how I believe working with people in social care settings should be done.

That is **SEA, Supporting, Empowering and Advocating**.

We should be **supporting** students' holistic college experience by providing quality experiences and, doing whatever we can to support those students who need it most, as well as having the knowledge and understanding to signpost students to additional support services they may need, without them feeling like we are trying to fob them off. Having good relationships with the student support services in the college helps us do this seamlessly and aligns to what I mentioned above about the need to develop partnerships TU Wide.

We should be **empowering** students to self-advocate. Fighting for more seats for students on every board or committee across the TU. Students are the largest stakeholders in any university and as such they should have representation at all levels. Students, such as class and school reps may require additional supports or training to help them in their roles so they feel confident enough to be able to advocate for themselves and their peers, and we need to offer this to on an ongoing basis. We also need to be talking to all students about issues that are affecting students not just in TU Dublin but nationally. To encourage them to get involved and have their voices and opinions heard on important topics such as the cost (seen & unseen) of college, student accommodation, universal design for learning, alternative assessment methods and so much more.

Importantly, for students who need it most we need to **advocate** on their behalf. This could be on issues such as gender-neutral bathrooms, affordable canteen prices, inclusive canteen options, increased supports for students in direct provision, increased student spaces for quiet time / prayer, increased physical accessibility across our campuses, increased supports for those with disabilities both seen & unseen, increased supports for student parents & carers, and so much more beside. For those who don't have a voice, or those who don't feel able to fight for themselves for whatever reason, we need to be their advocates.

### **Anything else??**

In closing I would like to say, my manifesto as you will see is not filled with empty promises to curry favour and win votes. My manifesto, I hope, explains to you a bit about me and why I genuinely believe I am the best person for the position of president 2022-2023. There are lots of roles out there at the moment I could apply for with my degree, but I am **choosing** instead to **run for election** for this position because I genuinely care about students of TU Dublin, and I want to make sure that they get the representation they deserve.

So, I am asking you to put your trust in me and vote

**'Les for Pres' on March 29<sup>th</sup>- 31<sup>st</sup>**

by selecting Lesley Barrett as your number 1 for President.

Go raibh maith agat.

If you would like to speak to me about any of my manifesto points or get involved in the campaign please do not hesitate to contact me by email [voteforlesley@gmail.com](mailto:voteforlesley@gmail.com) or by ph.: 086 0628753