1994

The DIT Examiner: the Newspaper of the Dublin Institute of Technology Students' Union April, 1994

DIT: Students' Union

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DIT Gets Governing Body

A Governing Body has finally been appointed for the Dublin Institute of Technology, four months late, but the honeymoon period could be shortest ever.

The DIT Act provides for the election of two academic staff representatives to the Governing Body but it met for the first time last week without these two representatives, and also without the two student representatives also provided for in the act. It will meet again this week to discuss the institute's business for the next two years and the Teacher's Union of Ireland (TUI) has expressed deep dissatisfaction with the current situation.

"We have taken legal advice on the matter and have been told that any decisions taken by the body as it is now be challenged in the courts," Eddie Conlon told the DIT Examiner. Mr Conlon is the vice chairman of the Dublin College's branch of the TUI. "We are very unhappy with them meeting without the staff representatives being present."

The reason that there are no academic staff representatives on the governing body is that none have been elected and the reason for that is that last November the TUI and a part time teacher (PTT) took out a high court action to prevent the elections from taking place on the grounds that the regulations set by the old governing body precluded EPTs from voting in such elections. Last month the High Court decided that the EPTs had full voting rights.

It is an extremely messy situation. According to Mr Conlon, the old regulations are now invalid and so elections cannot be held under them. Yet, up to now there has been no Governing Body to set new election regulations.

USI Defiant Despite Setback

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) has again said that it will not use union funds to pay the legal costs owed to the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), this despite the recent decision by Trinity College to hand over £14,000 in capitation funds to the receiver appointed for SPUC.

"We are not going to pay, USI is not going to pay, the student support trust is going to pay, that's the money that's fund raised," said Helen O'Sullivan, incoming President of USI. "USI is not going to pay union funds and that's always been clear."

The Student Support which is campaigning for donations to raise funds to clear the union's debts has so far raised about £10,000, leaving a shortfall of approximately £45,000. However, the matter will not as simply resolved as that.

Exam stress is a very serious problem. It can cripple the most able of students. But it can be overcome.

Helen O'Sullivan will take over as President of USI at the end of next month. We talked to her about her plans.

PAGE 10

In the new film from Peter Weir, Jeff Bridges, one of America's most versatile and talented actors, shows that he is also Fearless.

PAGE 5

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PAGE 8

Students' Union elections were held across the DIT last month. There were a couple of surprises. We show who got what and where.

PAGE 9

Dr. Brendan Goldsmith

PAGE 12

PAGE 13

PAGE 14

PAGE 15

PAGE 16

PAGE 17

PAGE 18

PAGE 19

PAGE 20

PAGE 21

PAGE 22

PAGE 23

PAGE 24

PAGE 25

PAGE 26

PAGE 27

PAGE 28

PAGE 29

PAGE 30

PAGE 31

PAGE 32

PAGE 33

PAGE 34

PAGE 35

PAGE 36

PAGE 37

PAGE 38

PAGE 39

PAGE 40

PAGE 41

PAGE 42

PAGE 43

PAGE 44

PAGE 45

PAGE 46

PAGE 47

PAGE 48

PAGE 49

PAGE 50
Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

The article in the January issue of your paper under the heading "Survey Results - As Expected" which relates to the Canteen in Kevin Street College, contains a number of inaccuracies and omissions.

The article states that the price of tea and coffee was increased twice this year. This is not correct. Increases were charged in other DIT colleges and are cheaper than some. The cost of the main lunch meal is the cheapest of all the Colleges with ample portions served as the survey demonstrated.

The question of facilities, furniture etc. are outside the control of the Canteen Committee.

Yours Sincerely,
Brendan Woods
Secretary

The Editor replies

With regard to the results of the survey, Mr. Woods writes that 78.5% of students regarded the food quality as adequate, very good or excellent. This is not the case. The students' satisfaction was displayed in a survey by the Students' Union.

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The Editor

The following have been appointed to the new Governing Body of the Dublin Institute of Technology:

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VEC nominations:
Mr Peter Burke, Cllr Mary Freehill, Mr. Michael O'Halloran, Cllr Vincent Jackson, Cllr Lucia O'Neill, Mr Tom Simpson.

VEC Nominating Bodies:
Frank O'Reilly (ICTU), Mr Pierce Pigott (Institute of Engineers), Dr Tom Hardiman (Dublin Chamber of Commerce), Mr Niall Meghan (IBEC), Ms Maureen Dunne (INOU).

Two staff representatives and two student representatives have yet to be appointed. It is usual that the incoming President of DITSU be named as one of the student representatives.

This year that will be Colman Byrne, currently Convener of the Students' Union in DIT Mountjoy Square.

Clarification

It has been brought to our attention that in an article in the previous edition of the DIT Examiner headlined Central Banking, it could have been construed that the Central Social and Cultural Committee was a committee run by Dublin Institute of Technology Students' Union (DITSU).

This is not the case. It is a committee of which DITSU is a member. The reference to the committee at one point as a "company" was a typographical error.

Should you encounter anything you feel should be clarified in this, or any other issue of the DIT Examiner, please contact the Editor and these matters shall then be clarified in the next issue.

DITSU, DIT Kevin Street, Kevin St., Dublin 8. Ph/Fax: 4783154

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The administrative staff at the heart of a dispute in the Dublin Institute of Technology have voted to accept proposals from the Department of Education and will not now go on strike this week. But Jim Behan, Chairman of the Administrative Staff Association in the DIT, warned that the fighting might not be over yet.

"We'll have to wait until the end of May when the final structures are in place. We might have to do a bit of fighting. I think it's going to be a long summer."

Under the DIT Act of January 1993 the Vocational Educational Committee and the Dublin Institute of Technology have separated and administrative staff have transferred from the VEC to the DIT. The dispute centres around the promotion of administrative staff.

The Department of Education has been insisting that three principal officers, Finance, Building Services and Personnel, be required to have a third level qualification, this despite the fact that, in the past, employment in these positions did not stipulate such qualifications once the person had relevant experience. IMPACT, the union representing the administrative staff, was reasonably willing to concede the personnel post and to give it a confined filling.

"We're still not particularly happy with the situation," said Mr Ryan. "We still don't see the need for third level qualifications on the finance post."

However the feeling at the meeting held last week seems to have been that there was not reason enough to take action at the present time. Out of 152 who voted, 100 voted against strike action. It had become clear to both sides in the dispute that interim staffing proposals would have to be accepted if the institute was to continue operating efficiently.

"Since the DIT split from the VEC no staffing structures have been put in place," said Mr Behan. The VEC had handled administration since the split, as it had had the computer software necessary.

"We've all been doing extra work, the people in Ballsbridge are running two payrolls for example."

The agreement between the DIT and the VEC ended on March 31st and no system has been set up to replace it, though the DIT has said that one was being set up. For now, trouble has been averted but the DIT may not be out of the woods yet.

Final proposals for staffing will be made at the end of May and these could cause problems.

"I'm not saying we'll accept them but we will be in negotiation," said Mr Ryan.

A fourth principal officer post has also been created. This long-term temporary post will have a confined first filling and will be reviewed after an unspecified number of years.

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Tucked away on Chatham Row, off Grafton Street, is a medium sized red bricked building, not very imposing, just there. Were it not for the music constantly emanating from it, seems, the very walls and the steady stream of people entering and exiting with cases of unusual shape, you might pass by without giving it a glance. For this is DIT Chatham Row, the College of Music, noisily gong about its business but without attracting the occasional attention or high profile afforded the other constituent DIT colleges.

The college of music has not featured in previous issues of the DIT Examiner - it doesn't seem to attract news and news does not emanate from it. It has a few profile and certainly is not one of the Institute's big guns. Eilis Farrell is the Deputy Principal of the college and has noticed that DIT Chatham Row has not made an appearance in the paper. Aside from any journalistic lapses, which are naturally denied most strenuously, why is this so?

"I suppose that because in institute terms, we would have been one of the last to have whole-time students and degree courses. We only had our first degree course in 1986. So it's been a question of developing those, whereas the other colleges would have had whole-time students for much longer. Also it's because we had a history of teaching first and second level students and for that reason we would have been different from the other colleges."

There is also the obvious and obviously detrimental physical location of the college of music. Other sites either physically stick out or are associated with large numbers of third level students wandering in and out or simply hanging around. Given that DIT Chatham Row has only 80 such students at the moment, it is somewhat lim a surprise than it should be that people often forget that it is a third level institution.

The disadvantageous location is the biggest problem for Dr Farrell and not only because it tends to leave the college out of sight and out of mind.

"For example, the third level students here have very few facilities, not enough space to practice, not enough space for them to even have rehearsals. Our concert band, which is one of the highlights of the musical world in Dublin, practice in a small hall which seats comfortably about 60 people but there are 60 people in the band and the noise they make reverberates back on themselves. So we've been very short changed in terms of space for student facilities.

If you've ever whinged or griped about the size of your common room, glance around that of Chatham Row (it won't take long) and gripe no more. I've seen fridge freezers delivered in larger boxes."

Dr Farrell believes that the college has been undervalued and the above reasons have certainly contributed to this unfortunate situation.

"Music education in schools in this country is a very poor state, we're providing at first and second level an awful lot of the functions that should be done in schools. But they have nowhere else to go and so they come to us. And so I think there should be a greater awareness of what the college has contributed over the years to the development of music education in this country."

"Dr Farrell is a cheerful, energetic person who smiles a lot and talks in lengthy bursts and so when she says something startling it can take time to register. Consider her next statement."

"If it wasn't for somewhere like here there probably wouldn't be half the musicians returned and there'd be a very poor state of music in this country, if any."

That is a very big thing to say, especially when considering the importance placed in music in this country. Our fondness and reputation for music are aspects of ourselves we are rightly proud of, and yet that statement slipped past me in the interview.

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Feared opens with an utterly calm, disinterested man walking through a cornfield with a baby cradled in his arm. There is something wrong with the scene and it is only when he emerges from the field do we see what that is. The camera pulls back and we get a panoramic view of the devastation and panic around this man. A plane has crashed into the field, there are bodies everywhere, emergency services doing their best, survivors frantically searching for family members and friends. But not this man. He calmly hands over the child to its mother and walks into a hotel where he showers and sleeps.

Max Klein (Jeff Bridges) boarded the plane a terrified passenger but, having been faced with what he assumed was the immediate risk of death, he lost all fear and was elevated to a state of enlightenment. It gave him a taste for life and a feeling of invulnerability which he tells his increasingly alienated wife (Isabella Rossellini) he will never give up, even at the expense of his marriage.

He further endangers his marriage by facing what he assumed was the imminent settlement, if only his client will behave normally. Meanwhile the airline appointed therapist (John Turturro) struggles with the dilemma posed by Max, as does an opportunistic lawyer (Tom Hulce) who foresees a huge fee. The problem with his new film, which he also co-wrote, is that it wants to be a thriller, a mystery and a drama about family, loyalty and honour. Rowdy can handle action films but he has tried too hard with Striking Distance, padded it with too much guff, making it too thin in all the wrong areas and paradoxically, flabbily all over.

Bruce Willis, wisely not covering up his thinning hair, plays Tom Hardy, a cliche cop, a maverick, a loner, a cop on the edge, a drinker. A former homicide detective in Pittsburgh, he was busted down to river patrol after the death of his father, apparently from a plane crash. A former passenger but, having been forewarned by Max, he calmly hands over the child to its mother and walks into a hotel where he showers and sleeps.

Bruce Willis and Sarah Jessica Parker star in a dumb movie.
In the weeks and days leading up to this year’s annual USI Congress, worries were expressed by a number of delegates that this was to be a congress spectacular only for the boredom it was guaranteed to engender. The motions didn’t look all the interesting, they said, there won’t be much debate and all we can look forward to is getting gloriously drunk. They were half right.

Congress ’94, held once again in the comfortable surroundings of the Talbot Hotel in Wexford, was a socially and professionally interesting affair during the day and a lifetime-threateningly drunken one once darkness fell. Only occasionally did the debates spark into life, most notably during the debates on the prioritisation of the Irish language version over the English in all university sectors, during which an opportunity to discuss the enforcement of gender quotas on the prioritisation of the Irish language was abundantly expressed by a number of delegates.

Secondly, when Helen O’Sullivan was announced the winner in the presidential election, the applause was genuine, as were the cheers, but there was a general sympathy in the hall. The turnout was, he said, disgraceful. Common Academic Calendar was debated, far from it in fact. On some subjects people were only too pleased to speak, on others it would have been easier to get people out of bed on Sunday morning than to get them onto the podium. Repetition naturally abounded, the election results are printed elsewhere but two things are worth mentioning.

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Secondly, when Helen O’Sullivan was announced the winner in the presidential election, the applause was genuine, as were the cheers, but there was in them sympathy and respect for the other candidate, Damian O’Broin. Helen spent the rest of the day deaming and Damian did not let that get him down. But by 10.45, sessions of congress were well under way and there were, as Paul McReedy from DIT Kevin Street, irately pointed out, only about 20 delegates in the hall. The turnout was, he said, disgraceful. The hall was gradually filled up as slightly delicate people were hunted down (some has taken pot shots at non-university colleges. They were asked to leave by steering committee member Dave Carmody and quietly, quickly complied.

Meeting the requirement that this was to be a congress spectacular, the only thing to be seen was the great big banner that said, "This is what a congress looks like." Actually, nothing happened and my humane side firmly believes that this was a good thing. There young people, who simply did not look like they were enjoying their age, did sip into the back of the hall but, God love them, they couldn’t have looked more out of place if they’d come in wearing slacks and over-cropped jumpers. They were expected by steering committee member Dave Carmody and quietly, quickly complied.

Saturday was also the day when the Common Academic Calendar was debated, giving UCD in particular the chance to take pot shots at non-university colleges. "Ladies and gentlemen, those there out there, who want to be universities," began one. The motion contained the following: Congress believes that this outdated system should be abolished and a new common academic calendar introduced." It was passed to cheer but the biggest cheer was reserved for the remarkable Nora Joyce from UCD whose breathless historiography was thoroughly deserved.

The drinking that night was protracted and assiduous but, in keeping with the general feel of the weekend, sombre enough. Nonetheless, the effects were real enough, as the attendance the next morning testified.

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The drinking that night was protracted and assiduous but, in keeping with the general feel of the weekend, sombre enough. Nonetheless, the effects were real enough, as the attendance the next morning testified.

The breakfast room was empty at 9.30. Not much of a surprise given that some people were musing 'good morning', as they braved their way up to their rooms. But by 10.45, sessions of congress were well under way and there were, as Paul McReedy from DIT Kevin Street, irately pointed out, only about 20 delegates in the hall. The turnout was, he said, disgraceful. The hall gradually filled up as slightly delicate people were hunted down (some has taken pot shots at non-university colleges. They were asked to leave by steering committee member Dave Carmody and quietly, quickly complied.

Saturday was also the day when the Common Academic Calendar was debated, giving UCD in particular the chance to take pot shots at non-university colleges. "Ladies and gentlemen, those there out there, who want to be universities," began one. The motion contained the following: Congress believes that this outdated system should be abolished and a new common academic calendar introduced." It was passed to cheer but the biggest cheer was reserved for the remarkable Nora Joyce from UCD whose breathless historiography was thoroughly deserved.
Congress Speak

With so many people speaking so much (so much what it would be invidious to say) it was inevitable and natural that some, at some stage, while extemporizing on a subject dear to their hearts, would verbally stumble, fail their arms in desperation and then fall flat on their faces. A few had the good grace to remain, heads down, waiting for the moment to pass before they continued. Others ploughed on oblivious of their linguistic fumbles.

The remarks we have collected here are not designed to humiliate nor are they intended as a sneer, as it is patently obvious that public speaking is a daunting task at the best of times and is only marginally preferable to root canal work at the worst. They are merely presented as the amusing, occasionally unintended but unavoidable aspect of Congress that they are. Some are anonymous but that doesn't really matter.

Friday:
"I'd like to support the motion though I don't entirely support it" - Female delegate speaking on an Irish language motion.

"I agree with the tenor of the motion behind the motion before us here today." - Mike Egan, USI Education Officer.

"It's a lot of hassle at times ... bit of a hassle, it is a bit of a hassle." - Male UCD delegate.

"If people think it's too whatever way they don't like it." - Same guy, same speech.

"A house where people sit in." - Deputy President Damian O'Brien's pithy description of the nature and function of the Seanad.

"I'd like to congratulate Helen and Colm and Mike, Noleen and Damian. Oh, Sorry Damian." - Steering Committee member Emmet Malone - on the outcome of the USI elections. Damian had just lost out to Helen in the election for President.

Saturday:
"I'm not proud that we believe in gender balance and I'm not proud that we need it ... but I'm personally against it." - Bolton Street Deputy Convener Ronan Haughey.

"Sorry, I've lost my train of thought now." - Ronan, some minutes later.

"It exists. It works. Join it. It's a giggle." DITSU President Deirdre O'Brien gives his considered opinion on Common Academic Calendar.

"A lot of people think that it only affects parents with children." UCD delegate Stephanie Leahy on childcare.

"It's against the wishes of the normal students on the ground." - Colman Byrne, Convener, COMAD on women's autonomy, referring to recent referenda in DIT.

"1 1 1 ... I'm just so... so... I mean... I can't, simply can't, do not understand... just don't... can't... can't believe." - UCD delegate Nora Joyce on everything.

"It's a mad drug, speed, isn't it?" - Speaker after Nora.

"Are we saying that there's some genital deformity - oh, genetic, genetic - deformity in women." - USI President Tom Duke summing up the motion on gender balance.

"I'm not going to get up here and be misogyn, misoq, mis, whatever that word was the Colman used a few minutes ago." - Ronan Haughey proves he's not a misogynist speaking on WR4; women in education.

Sunday:
"Steps. Oh Jesus. Steps." - USI Women's Rights Officer Helen O'Sullivan tries to negotiate some steps on Sunday while simultaneously regretting that last drink on Saturday night.

"It's as effective as, as... it's not very effective at all" - metaphors fail Colm Keaveney on UO 13, campaigning strategies.
Stressed Out

It doesn't matter that you have been doing them since the days when the Inter-Cert was the greatest academic obstacle you thought you'd ever see. It is immaterial that you have been consistently successful over the years, averaging 70% and upwards, and it is perfectly irrelevant that you are well prepared for them this year: exams are stressful; it's that simple. Stress is part of life and exam situations can help you learn to deal with stress. But that's not an especially comforting thought. Especially not now.

Susan Lindsay is a student counsellor in the DIT. At the moment she is counselling, on average, five students a day, and work is "hectic". There have been many requests for deferral.

Too much pressure. Unfair on the students. They can't be expected to compress all they've learned into three hours. We've heard them all before, but that doesn't mean they are not valid or accurate statements. But things are changing. These days the exams in many courses are divided, with one set at Christmas and another at the beginning of summer.

Semesterisation is "basically a good idea" for exam purposes, according to Ms Lindsay.

"The whole thing is that it should be an early warning system, that you're identifying at Christmas students who are having difficulties and who are not quite meeting the required standards, but in fact it creates an additional work load for us. "Yes, I think it can work but there has to be the back up support there; they'll obviously have to improve resources because there's only so much we can cope with. If they are going to change things like that, there is a fall out and there are consequences and they need to provide support. I don't think they really have done that."

Ms Lindsay believes that prevention, preferable to cure, can begin a long time before the first signs of stress ever emerge:

"Something coming from them can mean more than from a deferral."

"If a person is having concentration problems, what I'd do is get them to keep a diary for a week, see how well they were doing. She cites their portability as one major virtue. "It's an idea not without merit but would rely on the goodwill of older students and the willingness of first years to listen at a time when they are wallowing in the fresh newness of college life, when they don't even want to think about exams."

"I think that sitting in front of a huge pile of notes and assiduously ploughing through them in search of that just finished feeling, and that deceptive sense of accomplishment, she advises breaking down the paper mountain into a number of smaller, more manageable piles. "It can make it less daunting." She is also a big fan of key cards, though they are best for more factual subjects."

The first step is organisation, "trying to control some of the chaos, getting things in order, sorting things out". For those who think that sitting in front of a huge pile of notes and assiduously ploughing through them in search of that just finished feeling, and that deceptive sense of accomplishment, she advises breaking down the paper mountain into a number of smaller, more manageable piles. "It can make it less daunting." She is also a big fan of key cards, though they are best for more factual subjects. She cites their portability as one major bonus.

The best thing coming up to exams though, she feels, and this one will doubtless generate groans the length and breadth of the city, is to sit down and answer test questions, giving yourself a certain amount of time, using the exercise as a dress rehearsal for the real thing.

Her final words of advice on the subject are simple and obvious and the very words every student should whisper before every paper: "Don't panic. They are worth remembering."
Last month saw the various DIT sites whipped into something of a frenzy, or in some places a fairly light froth, as the elections for the students' unions took place. Naturally, the most high profile campaign was that for overall president. While it was generally felt that Colman Byrne and Eanna Ó Briadhaigh were the favourites, no-one was sure which way it would go. In the event, Colman won by a substantial margin, thanks in part to an impressive and highly successful campaign on his home turf. Elsewhere there were one or two surprises and, after the event, a little post election bitterness, expected of course, but never pleasant. All in all though, a quiet affair.

The DIT Examiner congratulates all of those who emerged victorious and offers commiserations to those whose plans will now have to change.

### Results of the DIT Students' Unions elections

#### Overall President of DITSU:
- Total poll: 3751, spoiled votes: 74, total valid poll: 3677, quota: 1839
- Byrne, Colman: 1745 (+245 in second count) = 1997
- Mulholland, Anne Marie: 700 (eliminated after first count)
- Ó Briadhaigh, Eanna: 1225 (+209 in second count) = 1434.
- NT: 246

Byrne, Colman elected.

**Anxious moments at the count for Overall President**

#### DIT Cathal Brugha Street:
- Position: Convener
  - Total poll: 608, spoiled votes: 14, total valid poll: 594, quota: 296
- Joyce, Colin: 291 (+49 in second count) = 346
- McCabe, Ciara: 99 (eliminated after first count)
- O'Neill, Alison: 215 (+34 in second count) = 249
- NT: 16

Joyce, Colin elected.

**Position: Deputy Convener**
- Total poll: 608, spoiled votes: 26, total valid poll: 830, quota: 416
- Haughey, Ronán: 495
- Reilly, Christopher: 161
- Smith, Marie: 174

Haughey, Ronán elected.

**Position: Apprentice Officer**
- Dempsey, David elected
- Flanagan, Alison: 651

Flanagan, Alison elected.

#### DIT Bolton Street
- Position: Convener
  - Total poll: 856, spoiled votes: 26, total valid poll: 830, quota: 416
- Haughey, Ronán: 495
- Reilly, Christopher: 161
- Smith, Marie: 174

Haughey, Ronán elected.

**Position: Deputy Convener**
- Total poll: 760, spoiled votes: 27, total valid poll: 733, quota: 367
- Barry, Mark: 82
- Flanagan, Alison: 651

Barry, Mark elected.

**Position: Apprentice Officer**
- Dempsey, David elected
- Flanagan, Hamrock, Ian elected
- McArdle, Aoife, elected

#### DIT Rathmines.
- Position: Convener
- Donohoe, Matt: 308

Moran, Lar elected.

#### DIT Mountjoy Square
- Position: Convener
  - Total poll: 900, spoiled votes: 3, total valid poll: 897, quota: 449
- Gilooley, Felicia: 35
- Hughes, Greg: 618
- O'Neill, Eoghan: 244

Hughes, Greg elected.

**Position: Deputy Convener**
- Total poll: 897, spoiled votes: 19, total valid poll: 878, quota: 440
- Lee, Mark: 443
- McCauley, Mary: 435

Lee, Mark elected.

**Position:**
- Clubs and Soc's Officer: Pedreschi, Damian elected
- PRO: Whelan, Robbie elected
- PTS: Ó Heineacháin, Durach elected
- Ent's Officer: Fitzpatrick, Joseph elected
This June, Helen O’Sullivan takes over from Tom Duke as President of the Union of Students in Ireland. She takes over at a time when USI has just moved into a modern and stylish new headquarters in Temple Bar, where it has recently had a reaffiliation victory in UCG and is still basking in the afterglow of an extremely well received presentation at last year’s National Education Convention, the invitation to partake in which was a kudo in itself.

It is not however, all roses. The spectre of the abortion debate has come back haunt USI, as all knew it would; the receiver appointed on behalf of SPUC is still waiting to collect the outstanding £15,000 in court costs. Add to this the seething troubles in Club USI, an impending reaffiliation vote in UCC that is up in the air and the very real possibility of further costs being awarded to SPUC in the future and you have an organisation that is going through a sweet and sour period. Was it ever any different?

For the incoming President, the ongoing situation with SPUC can have only one outcome, at least in the short term. It is her most pressing worry.

“One way or another SPUC are going to get their pound of flesh. That’s not to say that the money is going to come from affiliation fees because it won’t. That was a decision that was made a long time ago, but they are going to and we’re really going to have to look at fund raising.”

Like all in USI she is concerned that SPUC will be awarded further costs from the European court case - some have speculated that these could amount to £100,000 but remains committed to the stance the organisation has taken.

“I don’t think we can ever drop the case until it has been seen through one way or the other. I would have to see it dropped.”

Aside from this very obvious and worrying situation, Ms O’Sullivan, currently women’s rights officer in USI, has a number of priorities. Lining them off is as natural as brushing at this stage.

“Probably the most important and the one that sticks out is the need to increase communications between USI and the local unions because once you have that you’re forging very strong links and obviously that strengthens the whole organisation, makes all the other work a lot more achievable.”

She is also keen to resource the local unions in order to facilitate proper training. She favours a research, training and development officer rather than just an elected officer in charge of training. She agrees with the proposal made at Congress to abolish the position of Union Development Officer in Dublin but would like to see a regional officer appointed for the West of the country.

This will be debated at Special Congress.

“Communication and Resourcing, they are the two.”

Communication at Congress took a technological step forward this year with the introduction of simultaneous translation into English of Irish speeches. A Constitutional Amendment stating that translation equipment be available for all Conferences, Congresses and Officer Board Meetings of USI, has been referred back to Special Congress and Ms O’Sullivan will be asking the proposers of the motion to restrict it slightly, for the sake of practicality.

“We really do need to set up our Irish language resource properly, we need to budget for it properly too. I would be worried that we wouldn’t be able to achieve everything set out in the constitution, I would rather have a workable policy there than have an aspirational one.”

Students and students’ unions have been attacked recently, or at the very least challenged, for lacking a radical edge, for softening and turning all pragmatic and law abiding. Where are the huge protest marches, the unrepentant radical socialists? Where’s the candour for God’s sake?

It is probably true that students declaim less vociferously these days and have a better relationship with authorities than in the halcyon days of the sixties and seventies, but this brings its own difficulties. Ms O’Sullivan believes that USI has a new found respectability among the powers that
be, but she advises caution, "because it's one thing to have this new-found status but if it's a question of trying to buy us off with platitudes, you have to be very wary. You must never be compromised by position, that's one way of disabling an organisation."

She highlights the praise lavished on USI for its presentation at the National Education Convention. "And it deserved it, it was excellent but at the same time you have to make sure you're not compromised."

Well, it's not an exhortation to storm Leinster House but the scepticism seems alive and well. No paseran indeed.

As a woman who has fought tooth and nail for women's autonomy and who is a vigorous supporter of gender balance, Ms O'Sullivan must be in support of Education Minister Niamh Breatnach's attempts to enforce gender balance on all state bodies and governing bodies. But I suspect that she has, as do many, a problem with the manner in which the Minister is going about the task. Many have decried the Minister's heavy handedness, especially her decision to bring in amending legislation next year for the governing bodies of the DITs and RTCs.

"Looking at the people she's dealing with, I think she needs to be heavy handed. She certainly didn't try a softly softly approach, which probably lost her a lot of support at the beginning. But I think she's doing the right thing."

Meanwhile in Cork, the Minister has refused to approve the nomination to UCC's governing body of newly elected Students' Union President Fergal Shanahan because he is male. Yvonne Willis, vice president of the students' union has refused the seat, which traditionally goes to the President.

"The whole issue in Cork, the real issue is not gender balance," insists Ms O'Sullivan. "The real issue is that they only have one student representative and instead of pushing to have the male president nominated, they should be pushing to have two student reps and they're really missing the boat on this one."

But the fact remains that at the moment they have none and surely one democratically elected representative is better than none. I ask whether she thinks the Minister is by her actions hindering the effective operation of the Governing Body in UCC.

"Yes she is," she answers quietly.

On May 9, the students of UCC will vote on whether or not to reaffiliate with USI. Obviously the more colleges and universities under the umbrella of the organisation, the more influential it becomes and so reaffiliation must be part of every President's brief. Ms O'Sullivan is not sure how the Cork vote will go, though she points out that USI won't have the level of cooperation that it had in UCG. Elsewhere, there are problems. St Patrick's College, Maynooth, is something of a maverick and a reaffiliation was roundly defeated last year. Trinity is different again.

"There are a lot of problems in Trinity, I think its mainly financial. The union there has awful problems with its finances." She is of the opinion that once the question of the affiliation levy is sorted out it will become an awful lot easier to reaffiliate colleges. "The debate is about money rather than politics. It comes down to affordability and you invariably end up talking about money. It's a big shame."

Helen O'Sullivan seems to have no illusions about the year to come. There will be times when it may seem like a huge mistake and she admits to having "plenty of nerves" about her near future. But that is not necessarily a bad thing.

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Deirdre O'Brien, Helen O'Sullivan and Colm Keaveney in a reflective moment

Ciaran Crosbie shows us what student politics is really about

This song is for all you wonderful people out there - Colman Byrne
Aimee Mann, former singer and lyricist with "Ti Tuesday released her debut solo album, "Whatever" last year to universal critical acclaim and few sales. Her undemanding delivery and generally light sound disguise deeply personal, bared to the bone songwriting that is worth dwelling over. Clever, emotionally naked and intense, she plays the Gaiety Theatre on May 1 and should on no account be missed.

Her special guest has been confirmed as Mike Peters. The name is familiar, isn’t it? Peters was the lead singer with The Alarm - remember 68 Guns? and has now formed a new band, The Poets. Last month he released a new album, Back into the System. Wonder has he changed his big hairstyle? We shall see.

Tori Amos materialised onto the music scene a few short years ago with the deceptively catchy "Crucify" from her impressive "Little Earthquakes" album. The classically trained pianist with the decidely impenetrable lyrics and a fairly high weirdness quotient has just released a second, well-received album, "Under the Pink," from which the single "Cornflake Girl" was taken. She plays The Stadium on May 4th.

Antipodean wonder band Crowded House take the stage at The Stadium on May 4th. Despite the recent upset caused by their drummer’s decision to leave the band. Discerning music fans have known of and appreciated the band for years but it is only recently that they have acquired more of a big band status. The albums "Woodface" and "Together Alone" are responsible for this. They also have a good sense of self-deprecating wit which has endeared them to audiences. Should be one of the gigs of the summer.

Jackson Browne has been quiet for a few years, unless you count the high profile collapse of his relationship with Darrell Hannah. But he’s back now with a new album, I’m Alive, one of those bouncing back efforts which marks a move away from the politically flavoured Lives in the Balance. Expect a mature and no mean songwriter herself, she has also in the past chosen songs from some of the best writers around, including John Hiatt and Paul Brady.

This Saturday, one of Ireland’s most under-rated singers, Freddie White, plays An Béal Bocht. Now based in America he makes a welcome return to our shores to deliver songs from the finest in his imitable fashion. His ability to put his stamp on other people’s work, among them Randy Newman. Tom Waits (Martha). Ray Charles and Guy Clarke, has tended to overshadow his own songwriting ability. In the mood, the Cork man can deliver a blistering set with just that voice and that guitar.

The extremely prolific and if anything, increasingly popular, Mary Black will give a one off benefit concert on Thursday in the National Basketball Arena, Tallaght. The concert is in aid of St. Martin’s Centre for the Severely Handicapped, St Joseph’s School, Terenure. Her band is top rate, the catalogue of songs is second to none and the woman herself has a voice as pure as crystal.

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The Bank of Ireland RTÉ Proms starts on Friday, 27th May and runs until Friday, 3rd June. Don’t forswear it for won’t be made up of those Pomp and Circumstance scenes we’re used to from Last Night of the Proms on BBC. Among the highlights will undoubtedly be the Rodgers and Hammerstein Musical Extravaganza with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, on Saturday, 28th May: With兼顾 Requiem which will feature, amongst others, Bernadette Grevy and an Evening with Eleanor McEvoy, currently on the crest of a wave.

There will be a Last Night of the Proms, beginning at 8pm on June 3rd. Appropriately enough, the theme is Going to America and will include music from George Gershwain and Leonard Bernstein. An absolute treat.

On a slightly different note is Buddy, currently packing them in at the Olympia. It’s a singing and dancing nostalgia fest recalling the short, glorious career of the hugely influential Buddy Holly, played to perfection here by Martin Fisher. All the favourites are there to be relished and sung along to- Oh Boy, Peggy Sue, That'll be the Day. Is it theure? Is it concert? Is it tribute? Probably it’s all three and it’s damned good fun, whatever it is.

Moving away from music completely, Jack Dee will do his thing in the National Stadium. This man is something of a find: a three piece suit, a morose expression and a finely tuned sense of the ridiculousness of everything and the talent to turn it into dead pan comedy, as anyone who has seen him on stage or watched his Channel 4 series can testify. He has a superb sense of timing and can combine this with a physicality that belies his buttoned down image. Even his TV ads are funny. Catch him if you can.