

VOTE

KATIE

NÍ CHLÉIRE

FOR WELFARE

Mental Health
MATTERS MORE

OVERHAUL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

REFORM EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

IMPROVE STUDENT HOUSING

SUPPORT FOR PLACEMENT STUDENTS



KATIEFORWELFARE

VOTE ON: QUBSU.ORG ON 24TH / 25TH FEBRUARY



Hi! I'm Katie Ní Chléire, and I'm running to be
YOUR Welfare Officer!

Hi! Is mise Katie Ní Chléire agus táim ag rith chun
a bheith mar BHUR nOifigeach Leasa!

So, why am I running?

I have lived experience of having a mental illness at Queen's, and I don't want any other student to go through what I did. The mental health services in this university fail students consistently, and this isn't good enough.

Your university claims to offer an exceptional education, yet they continue to prioritise profits over student wellbeing at every turn. Students are treated as customers first, not humans first.

I'm running to be your Welfare Officer because I believe that we deserve better- we deserve better services, support, houses and health, and I'm going to work hard to make that a reality for you, because your mental health matters more.



Who am I?

I'm a final year **Social Work** student and an activist who has campaigned on many issues at Queen's and beyond, including mental health & suicide prevention, Irish Language rights, equal marriage, reproductive rights, workers' rights and climate change.

I've got loads of experience improving the lives of students.

I first got involved in the Student's Union by being a Consent Ambassador and a Course Rep. This year, I'm the School Rep for SSESW, I sit on Student Council, I'm a member of the Climate Action Group, and I sit on the Northern Ireland Healthcare Leadership Forum here at QUB.



Is Gaeilgeoir mé agus táim páiseanta faoi chearta teanga.

I'm passionate about Irish Language Rights and will campaign for increased language visibility and the introduction of bilingual signage at Queen's.

I have always been passionate about mental health and suicide prevention. I ran my first student-led mental health campaign when I was 15 and now sit on the National Panel of SpunOut, a youth-led mental health organisation. I also work as a Crisis Counsellor on a suicide helpline.

I think all this experience prepares me to support students and represent your welfare interests to the University.



Mental Health

Mental health issues significantly impact students, with **78% of students** in Northern Ireland experiencing mental health issues during their time at university.

We're telling students to reach out, that help is always there, but when we do, we're reaching out to **services that are broken**. The counselling services provided to students at Queen's are inflexible, with waiting lists and **only four counselling sessions** provided. For anyone with

any immediate mental health issue, this is dangerous. The university has a **duty of care** to the students here, and these structures **fail and neglect students** too often.

I will work alongside the Student Union President to continue the **OMNI campaign** and to ensure that it **tackles the structural issues** within the University that impact on student mental health. The OMNI results show that students want to see **investment in mental health services** – let's make sure this happens. I will no longer stand by as Queen's tries to solve the mental health crisis with fluffy solutions and ignore the real issues – **we need real reform and we need it now**.

I will ensure that personal tutors and student reps receive mental health first-aid training, so that when students reach out, **help is available**.



Loneliness

There are over 24,000 students at Queen's, but loneliness is still a massive problem, with the OMNI results finding loneliness to be a significant factor impacting on student mental health.

Students in Queen's Accommodation often feel **isolated and disconnected** from the student community. This is a particular challenge for International and GB students, especially when domestic students go home at weekends. I will work with Advice SU to do outreach in Elms BT9, BT1 and BT2, and bridge the gap between the Student's Union and Queen's Accommodation, and I will **lobby for more student events at weekends** for International and GB students.

Placement Students

The university needs to do **more for placement students**, who are being asked to commit to a **high workload with little flexibility**. Students are expected to place their lives on hold for the duration of every placement, and are told that if they take sick leave that they will fail their placements.

Many students must work **part-time jobs alongside their full-time placements**, leaving some students working over 60 hours a week to make ends meet. This has an unquestionable impact on the mental health of students and can lead to **burnout**.

Your degree matters, but your **mental health matters more**. This university refuses to accept this and tells you to put your degree above everything else – above your family, friends, health, and even your children.

I will engage with placement regulatory bodies (including NISCC, Nursing and Midwifery Council) to **give placement students worker's rights**; I will ensure that student support and mental health becomes a priority during placements, and to make sure that students can take sick leave, as per worker's rights.



Exceptional Circumstances



Exceptional circumstances are intended to reduce stress for students who find themselves in difficult situations for one reason or another. However, the process as it functions today places stress on students as too many students don't know the process, the guidance is unclear, it takes too much time, and it asks students to prove things like family member's deaths. Students sometimes end up being more distressed, even though the system is supposed to help.

Students aren't being made aware of processes such as self-certification, or that the University considers you "fit to sit" if you take an exam or submit an assignment.

I will lobby the university to reform the exceptional circumstances process – we need a system based on trust and compassion. We will fight for a system which provides adequate support at every step, clear guidance and actually helps students when they need it most.

Housing

Students live in abysmal conditions, which will inevitably impact on mental health and academic performance. Students cannot be expected to learn and to live healthy lives when they must go home to cold, damp houses.

I will continue the work of the current welfare officer, including continuing the Student Renters Group, and keep fighting against illegal letting fees and corrupt landlords. I will work alongside the council and landlords to ensure that students are informed about their rights as tenants.

I also oppose off-campus discipline. The university should not have the power to impose penalties for what happens when you're not on university grounds—it is none of their business and I will lobby for this policy to be scrapped.

Sexual Health

Every Monday between 1 and 4pm, there is a free sexual health clinic at Queen's. This is a fantastic service that many students avail of. I will ensure that this service can continue by lobbying for sustained and increased funding, and increase promotion to ensure that students are made aware of its existence.

Previous welfare officers have introduced free sanitary products and contraceptives to Student Union and library bathrooms. I will expand the locations to include contraceptive and sanitary products in more bathrooms on campus, including the PFC, MBC and Ashby Building. This aims to tackle period poverty among students and to remove the financial barrier to students engaging in safe sex.

I will develop guidance and information that is accessible and inclusive in regards to contraception and sexual health for students.

E-learning

I will develop e-learning modules on Canvas relating specifically to Student Welfare issues, including:

- Consent
- Sexual Health
- Mental health awareness
- Your rights & housing
- Where-to-go if...

