



**Gisèle Scanlon**

GSU President Elect 2020/2021

# **I-CARE Vision Statement**

#gisèlecares →



As GSU Vice President, I improved student welfare payments, mental health referrals and employment supports. I organised diverse cultural events, negotiated hot water for all students, including in St. James' and Tallaght hospitals and secured funding to develop the 1937 Reading Room.

I have continued to support students individually and collectively during COVID19. Now I want to take everything I've learnt and deliver positive change for all postgraduates. I am running for President because I CARE.

As we face new challenges around remote working, I will ensure you get the essential quality supports you need and that we respond to difficulties with **INNOVATION**

I will continue to strengthen Trinity's community connections and create a caring, listening, progressive Union, one which holds college and government accountable and demands fair policies on student accommodation and better conditions for the entire **COMMUNITY**

Having already won a new university policy

on postgraduate spaces. I will ensure the PG Renewal Project delivers equality of access to well-funded, inclusive education, spaces and services, promoting postgraduate

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

I will continue to stand up for research, working alongside the PhD Workers Rights Group to improve working hours, space, health and safety. I will lobby funders and Government for flexibility and increased resources. Progress on the SDGs, climate change, science and humanities requires proper investment in

## **RESEARCH**

I want every student to feel safe and equal, including through LGBTQ+ postgraduate safe spaces and gender neutral bathrooms. I will also lobby nationally for hate crime legislation. I will champion **EQUALITY**



→ **I Care** that as postgraduate students, we are key stakeholders in Trinity College and bright lights for innovation. Our thinking, energy, enthusiasm, creativity and investment is the lifeblood of the institution. I will ensure that College recognises and rewards that with respect and resources.

→ **I Care** about the quality of online-learning and postgraduate supports following the disruption from COVID-19. According to the findings of the Irish National Digital Experience INDEX survey, until recently 70% of Irish University teaching staff had never taught in a live online environment. I will lobby for extensive training and work closely with students, college and academic staff to maintain educational excellence, drive innovation and strengthen technological capacity in every Department to serve both taught and research students.

→ **I Care** about social and environmental sustainability. Innovation is not simply about technology or business, it is about doing things differently and better. As GSU President I will push the College to develop a culture of innovation which responds to challenges with imagination, collaboration and ambition and contributes to progress on climate targets and the UN SDGs

→ **I Care** that Trinity harnesses and maximises the societal and economic benefits from all postgraduate generated ideas and technologies and it is important that postgraduates share in those benefits. As President of the GSU I look forward to identifying and supporting collaboration opportunities and new partnerships which recognise and reward the role of postgraduate experts in addressing issues of internal, national and global importance.

→ **I Care** about the impact of COVID-19 on the social interaction which is important for students and I believe this is an area which also requires innovative thinking. I will review our GSU events, campaigns and other activities to develop creative strategies for safe social distancing or accessible online alternatives. We will find new, positive and inclusive ways to engage and support postgraduates.



→ **I Care** about the impact the COVID-19 crisis on the renewal and reform of the postgraduate experience which was promised in the College Strategic plan. As GSU President I will question the College about what this means for postgraduate reform and demand that progress is accelerated and adapted not delayed or stalled

→ **I Care** about a union which dynamically reflects and responds to the postgraduate community. I will initiate a full review of the Union's Constitution and its structure and develop a working group to review GSU policy to ensure that bringing motions to GSU Council become more democratic and that our online voice is accessible and encourages student engagement.

→ **I Care** about the wellbeing of the many postgraduate students who needed to seek help from the Student Assistance (Hardship) Fund this year. Over the last year I successfully secured new donations to the fund from across the Trinity Community but more is needed. As President I will lobby the College for a substantial increase to this fund so that the Postgraduate Advisory Officer has the resources to help you when you need it, particularly in light of COVID-19.

→ **I Care** about secure and affordable housing for students in the postgraduate community. Too many are suffering the consequences of

bad national policy and poor accommodation management, with some students pushed into homelessness and others left without correct refunds from private landlords during COVID-19. I have supported Peter McVerry and The Big Sleep Out and brought student's concerns directly to the Private Rental Tenancies Board. As GSU President I will actively campaign with Trinity Students' Union and USI and others for a national policy shift on student accommodation. I will also work with the College to improve the TCD postgraduate accommodation network in advance of the next college term.

→ **I Care** about the spaces we share as a community and the fact that some students still lack full access to facilities like kitchen space or common rooms. I will be pushing for practical implementation of the Postgraduate Spaces Strategy which I secured as Vice President. Many students are particularly concerned about the use of labs in the context of COVID-19 and I am proposing a staggered approach to lab work which will utilise College labs on downtime over the summer.

→ **I Care** about the mental health of students. Having supported many students who were already dealing with stress anxiety or depression I am acutely aware of the serious impacts the pandemic may have in relation to social isolation, disruption of plans, family and



financial issues including domestic violence, emotional abuse and internet addiction. As GSU President I will ensure that the Union develops systems to actively reach and engage with students facing mental health difficulties and strengthen referral pathways to College supports

→ **I Care** that the GSU is a welcoming encouraging and safe space for postgraduates, celebrating diversity and facilitating an enriching student experience. GSU supports an international student community from over 120 countries. 26% of our students come from outside Ireland. I intend, as GSU President, to actively take every opportunity to integrate all our students, whether based in Dublin or abroad, into a GSU global Community.

→ **I Care** that the GSU has access to and partnership with the wider student movement in Ireland. We intend to continue working closely with the Students' Union at Trinity and it has long been the GSU stance that we wish to be a full member of USI. This is something that previous GSU presidents and activists have lobbied hard for and I will build on their work. The huge and ongoing shortfall in third level funding, poor student accommodation policies

and precarious working conditions for postgraduate students are all issues that benefit from a national platform and a coordinated voice I believe that the GSU has much to contribute to and gain from USI membership

→ **I Care** about the wider community. Having campaigned with others in recent referenda, I know how students can contribute to change through activism and through volunteering. I will develop a working group to promote a culture of volunteering amongst the Trinity postgraduate community and partner with the Trinity Civic Engagement office to link postgraduates with local community organisations offering social and economic supports in disadvantaged areas.

→ **I Care** that the Provostorial candidates in next year's election who are seeking the support of students, demonstrate interest in and support for the postgraduate community, not simply for economic reasons but because they genuinely care.



→ **I Care** that some Trinity College spaces are inaccessible to students with disabilities. I am committed to working with Disability Services to publish a new long-term accessibility strategy for the whole Trinity campus

→ **I Care** about implementation of the EU Web Accessibility Directive and will be demanding disability friendly design in the development of Trinity's online resources and learning spaces. I will also review and revamp the GSU website and social media channels to enhance user accessibility and navigation and improve GSU digital engagement

→ **I Care** about sustainable transport. Trinity has only 1.5% car use and as GSU president I want to improve the cycling infrastructure, pedestrian access and public transport most students rely on. I will press for safer cycling routes between Trinity campuses and extension of the Free Travel Scheme and make sure students have input into the planned pedestrianisation of College Green. As part of the Healthy Trinity Committee I have already contributed to Dublin City Council consultations on transport and want to encourage civic/university collaboration around UN SDG 11 on sustainable cities. With this in mind, I want the GSU to co-host a Cycling Conference in 2021.

→ **I Care** about the challenges faced by students who wish to access services or represent themselves in Irish. I currently sit on both the Coiste na Gaeilge at Trinity College Dublin and Coiste na Gaeilge at USI. I intend to create a GSU Officer post in 2020 to specifically focus on Irish language and culture and develop Irish language supports for those who already speak it and those who are keen to learn. I will lobby the College to vindicate Irish speaking students rights in policy and practice and work with the USI and others to strengthen language rights across Ireland. I will also be pressing the college to develop policies that reflect ISL as an official language.

→ **I Care** about the visa policies which affect postgraduate students access to internships and placements. One of my first priorities in this regard will be lobbying for flexibility for Non-EU students, those who had to leave Ireland temporarily due to COVID-19, so that their two year working visa entitlement commences from the day they return to Irish soil.



→ **I Care** about fair and secure funding for postgraduate research. Most PhDs in Trinity are either unfunded or underfunded. This is symptomatic of the significant underfunding of research at national level. As President I will be lobbying for increased national investment including frontier and applied research across the humanities and sciences. Universities can and must play a key role in the response to COVID-19 and achievements of climate targets and the UN SDGs. The Cassels Report in 2011 called for a new national research and development strategy, Innovation 2020, which expires this year without reaching its potential. The development of its replacement, the National Research Strategy has been slowed because of COVID-19 and as GSU President I intend to seize this opportunity to make sure postgraduate researchers are heard in the design of that strategy.

→ **I Care** about the hidden costs and challenges of postgraduate research. Currently PhD stipends are not calculated on the living wage in the city where the researcher is based and a budget for personal equipment such as laptops, books and printing is not included in all state scholarships. As research can take many years, it is also essential that postgraduate students and researchers have access to secure, year-round, long-term tenancies. I will press for progress on all of

these issues as part of a more integrated approach to PhD supports

→ **I Care** about pay and conditions for postgraduates who work within the college. It is unacceptable that a proposal to reduce the hourly rate for teaching practical classes on casual payroll was brought to and passed by the Finance Committee in November 2019. As part of the GSU I lobbied strongly to reverse that decision and as President I will be vigilant in ensuring that rates for research, teaching and lab work are protected and improved. Research students deserve certainty of hours in teaching and tutorial work and set hourly rate of pay for all hours worked – including preparatory and correction work. As GSU President I will lobby for proper payment for all hours worked and support the PhD Workers Rights Group in their campaign to secure recognition of workers' rights for postgraduate researchers.

→ **I Care** about the disruption that COVID-19 has caused to our Research Community. As teaching hours will be set too late this year, some research students will not be able to avail of them. Many postgraduates involved in externally funded research have also faced challenges in meeting previously agreed deadlines. I have lobbied for greater flexibility from funders. I am pleased that many have



now given extensions but it is important those extensions come with additional resources. As President, I promise that immediately after taking office I will create a focused research working group to help draft plans in relation to how best support the entire research community during COVID-19 restrictions.

→ **I Care** that due to the economic downturn which is likely to follow COVID-19 there may be less employment in the immediate future. The time period between finishing a PhD and finding a post doc role should be streamlined to allow doctoral students who have completed all of their requirements but not formally graduated to apply for funding and jobs. Some of the current cohort of postgraduate researchers may face delays in securing an academic post and I intend to develop active partnerships to identify opportunities that might open up new horizons and alternative career paths for postgraduates, I will, for example, engage with the College to look at extension, improvement and diversification of placement strategy. I will also include issues of career progression in our GSU input to the National Research Strategy. I care about your Trinity experience but I also care about what happens after you leave.

→ **I Care** about PhD students, many of who have families and other financial responsibilities,

being free to earn what they need to supplement grants and stipends. I will support the raising of the earnings cap on Trinity's internally funded PhDs to €27,000 and also lobby for the reexamination of €16,000 limit on earnings for IRC funded PhDs. I will lobby College to increase the threshold point at which supplemental income impacts grant awardee status. It's a further freedom to T.A.s (teaching assistant) and demonstrators and anyone doing corrections and will also offer more freedom to postgraduates who work as supervisors





→ **I Care** about every student's right to participate fully in the life of our College without fear of prejudice, abuse or attack based on their ethnicity, race, sexuality or the other grounds identified under our equality legislation. I will be pushing for strong policies and sanctions on this within the College. I also want the GSU to play an active role in the 'Love Not Hate' campaign which is an alliance of migrant, Traveller and LGBTQI+ activists and organisations looking for the long overdue introduction of laws against hate crime in Ireland.

→ **I Care** about a GSU which reflects and supports the full diversity of the postgraduate student population and will establish a new GSU Equality Unit to capture the full depth and breadth of equality-based issues and develop new policy.

→ **I Care** about the concrete delivery of Trinity's commitment to "foster a more diverse and inclusive student community". As GSU President I will make sure the voices, experiences and concerns of postgraduate students are heard by the new Vice Provost for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and reflected throughout College strategy. Postgraduate workers must also be protected from discrimination under the 9 grounds laid out in the Equal Status Act. I will also ensure that the GSU continues to contribute to Trinity's achievements of Athena Swan standards for gender equality.

→ **I Care** about ensuring old and new spaces in our College are designed and developed with everyone's safety and participation in mind. As part of the equality proofing of the Postgraduate Spaces strategy, I want to deliver more LGBTQI+ postgraduate safe spaces and gender neutral bathrooms.

→ **I Care** about economic inequality. Having previously secured an increase in the Student Assistance Fund I will continue to lobby for more funding for this essential safety net and further resources for the Postgraduate Advisory Service. I will be engaging with College to ensure the commitment they have made in their new strategic plan to support students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds is reflected at postgraduate as well as undergraduate level. I will also be pressing for greater economic security for postgraduate workers across the college including teaching and lab assistants.

→ **I Care** about mature students and those returning to education and understand the opportunities and challenges associated with that journey. I am also aware that many postgraduates, mature students in particular may be balancing family responsibilities with their academic work. As GSU President, I am committed to widening access and ensuring the diverse experience and needs of postgraduate students are reflected in University policy and planning.