



Eoghan Gilroy

EOGHAN GILROY has managed to climb the ladder of student politics almost to the very top and shows no sign of slowing down (even over a year after graduation). The Union of Students in Ireland's (USI) newly elected vice-president for academic affairs has somehow managed to side-step both collegiate and national controversies but how has he done so and will they one day come back to bite him?

For many people, college is the best time of your life. Student politicians must know this better than anyone else since they do their utmost to prolong their university experience for as long as possible. Gilroy has taken this sentiment very seriously. He has gone from a part-time officer with Trinity College Dublin Students' Union (TCDSU) to a class rep, a faculty convener, TCDSU education officer and vice-president, and now finally vice-president for academic affairs at the USI, which has been newly christened Aontas Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ).

Basically, if there's one thing student politicians love more than avoiding facing adulthood, it is increasingly lengthy and more than incidentally bilingual initialisms. But what do these positions and initialisms mean and why is it of interest that Gilroy is the one to climb this specific ladder?

Gilroy came to the vice-presidency of TCDSU under somewhat controversial circumstances – 'somewhat controversial circumstances' being the key buzzwords that have defined TCDSU's 2024/25 campaign.

After the shock resignation of former education officer Cat Arnold in April 2024, Gilroy took over as vice-president and education officer a month early, making him the longest-serving current TCDSU member – and boy, has it been a long year. (Arnold left over irreconcilable differences between herself and former president László Molnárfi, claiming that she had endured a "fraught year with consistent issues of a toxic workplace environment" as well as other issues.)

President Jenny Maguire, always fashionable and never quiet, has spent the past year since then in an increasing state of social justice-fuelled fury. Despite what parents may tell their temper-tantrum toddlers before dropping them off at creche, sometimes anger does solve your problems. Jenny and her union (with Gilroy in tow) succeeded in freezing proposed rent increases, fixing incorrectly translated Gaeilge signs on campus and expanding the placement of period products in bathrooms.

With each victory, the union grew bolder until it completely exploded. Yet curiously, Gilroy managed to avoid getting hit by any of the debris.

What detonated this explosion was the increasing anger about the third of female college students who are sexually assaulted annually in Irish colleges. The result was the rapist-effigy controversy that occurred in Trainers this year and which many perceived to have been a self-inflicted, damaging blow against an urgently needed campaign against

violence and rape endured by women.

In early April of this year, TCDSU decided to raise awareness of sexual assault on campus. It is hard to imagine the most misogynist elements objecting to students raising awareness of this very important issue but the campaigners managed to gift such sources with their crass tactics and imagery.



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TCDSU lynched a mannequin representing a rapist, while not providing any support or details about organisations that help victims. They then administered beatings to the effigy with bats (with multiple presentations over multiple days) and posted anonymous confessions of people describing their sexual assault on the door of the junior dean without asking the consent of the people who submitted the confessions.

A social media storm ensued, with TCDSU issuing a blanket apology, saying: "We, TCDSU/AMLCT, are so deeply sorry for the distress and harm caused by the Union's actions this week... The campaign's use of graphic imagery, effigies, and confrontational language – such as comments about STEM students – was inappropriate and deeply hurtful, especially to survivors of sexual violence."

This escapade rocked Trinity's campus. Instagram accounts were set up demanding the resignation of Maguire and welfare and equality officer Hamza Bana, the two main TCDSU officers behind the idea. Emergency town hall meetings were called to allow the student body to question the officers involved in organising the demonstrations.

If not for the fact that it was already April and the 2024/25 union officers would be taking their final bows soon, the campaigns against Maguire and Bana might have gained more traction. Instead, the controversy was managed and carefully anaesthetised by none other than Gilroy, who somehow managed to play both sides masterfully.

The town hall that was called to hold TCDSU officers to account was chaired by Gilroy. The apology on behalf of TCDSU was issued by Gilroy. And yet the union official with the least involvement appears to have been Gilroy.

Although he placed himself front and centre of the union's apologies, there is no evidence that he was personally involved in organising or participating in the effigy demonstrations. One reason there is no evidence is that there were no minutes taken during the union meetings called to organise this protest. ('How convenient,' scream the conspiracy theorists. 'Typical union disorganisation,' sigh many others.)

Whatever, it is undeniable that his experience in student politics stood him in good stead, enabling him to come out of a disaster such as this entirely unscathed. The town hall meeting was held on April 10 and by April 15 Gilroy had been elected to the executive team of the USI, overseeing tens of thousands of students across the country.

The USI/AMLÉ states on its website that executive members of staff are the "public face" of its organisation. By keeping his name and face unconnected to major controversies and acting as an impartial peace broker when catastrophe unfolded, Gilroy toed the line perfectly in the run-up to his national election.

Gilroy has spent a total of five years involved in student politics and is about to embark on his sixth, with the potential of more if he decides to run for election again with AMLÉ next year (many of the union's officers run for multiple terms).

He has also had some experience in real-world politics, however, interning for nine months in 2017 for Independent senator Lynn Ruane.

If that wasn't enough politics for one person, he also has a degree in law and political science from Trinity.

In a country where who you know and where you met them can get you a long way in politics, this already appears to be a pretty sturdy foundation on which to build a potential career in proper, grown-up politics. Coming over as the sole adult in the room during the effigy crisis may stand to Gilroy as he moves forward into an industry where controversy is never far away.