



# Grace McNally

THE NEW president of Trinity College Dublin Students' Union (TCDSU) is Westport native and general nursing student Grace McNally. Her ascension to the position came after the shock resignation of Seán Thím O'Leary (see *The Phoenix* 5/9/25) from the job on Halloween last year. McNally is unaffiliated politically but that doesn't mean her allegiances are unclear. She cites the treatment of health science and nursing students as her motivation for first getting involved in the union. She is also no stranger to the plight of students in Dublin, spending most of last year commuting from Westport and couch surfing.

McNally took on the role after a by-election last November to serve out the remainder of O'Leary's term. The shortened mandate has clearly not satisfied her appetite for the job and she has put her name down in the contest for president in the 2026/7 academic year. This is the first time in recent memory that a TCDSU president has run for re-election.

McNally's rise to power began when she helped to organise the vacancy in the president's office. O'Leary took leave from the job at the beginning of October last year, citing a flare up of dysthymia (a form of depression). Less than a week after this, McNally and her allies made their intentions public in a *University Times* (UT) article, where she called for O'Leary's resignation.

Her complaints ranged from genuine failures on the president's part to seemingly trivial issues. It appears that O'Leary was not working as hard as was promised in the campaign and they struggled to properly manage union meetings.

In a strange litany of complaints, O'Leary was accused of campaigning "insincerely" and would refer to colleagues by their titles, which some found "dehumanising".

One union hack was concerned that, during the first week of term, people were asking who the president was. If this were a serious cause for concern, it ought to have taken down every TCDSU president this decade. The turnout in McNally's election in November was roughly 16%.

In the UT article, McNally stated that she saw "controlling, dictatorial tendencies" in O'Leary. Another hack claimed that a motion to impeach was "inevitable".

On October 23, Trinity's Historical Society held a debate on the future of TCDSU. At this event, McNally expressed an intent to "rip Seán Thím O'Leary apart". Despite all this, she told Goldhawk she was surprised when O'Leary resigned just a week later.

Trinity BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) chair Harry Johnston and public relations officer Seán Radcliffe joined McNally in calling for O'Leary's resignation.

Both Radcliffe and Johnston have worked for Social Democrats TD Síneád Gibney and are respectively vice-chair and chair of the party's Rathdown branch. Radcliffe was also treasurer of the Rathdown arm of President Catherine Connolly's election campaign last year.

Even though Radcliffe and Johnston were committee members during O'Leary's time as

TCDSU Soc Dems chair, party loyalty failed to protect O'Leary from them.

After playing her part in the successful ousting of O'Leary, McNally contested the November by-election, alongside three other candidates. She won on the fourth count with 1,593 first-preference votes, beating second-placed Lorenzo Cheasty, who had received 987 first preferences.



Grace McNally

A candidate of note was Jacob Barron, who finished third and represented the more conservative side of the student population. He was backed by the Freedom4Students movement, which advocates for voluntary membership of the students' union (as opposed to the current mandated membership). He received 527 first-preference votes.

Fourth-place candidate Callum O'Kelly was found in breach of election regulations on polling day after he used his Grindr profile (an LGBT dating app) in his election campaign.

Since coming to office, McNally has overseen the establishment of a Sexual Violence Taskforce, whose formation was mandated directly after the effigy controversy. The taskforce's goal is to screen SU protests in relation to sexual violence and ensure they are appropriate. But McNally failed to condemn the highly controversial effigy campaign run by her predecessor, Jenny

Maguire, and former welfare and equality officer Hamza Bana.

The campaign encouraged students to beat with a metal pipe effigies representing rapists, which were hung outside several locations on campus. Anonymous statements of sexual assault survivors were also published across campus, without the consent of the authors of the statements.

It caused an outcry on the Trinity campus and ultimately led to Maguire and Bana being censured in a campaign that was led by O'Leary.

The controversy does not seem to have stuck to Maguire, who has been a regular contributor to the *Irish Independent* since leaving the role of TCDSU president as well as making the 2026 'ones to watch' lists of both the *Irish Times* and the *Indo*.

McNally has also thrown the SU's weight behind the most recent Trinity BDS initiative, calling for an end to the dual BA programme between Trinity and Columbia University. This campaign began last year following the suspension of several Trinity students for taking part in pro-Palestinian protests on the American campus.

As head of Rathdown Soc Dems, Johnston also leads BDS in this fight. TCD Soc Dems are led by O'Leary's successor as chair, Arlo Tavel.

Ever aware of constituency politics, McNally has made the plight of health science students a key part of her manifesto and her work, with things unlikely to change for her second tilt.

Getting re-elected is no easy task however, with the busiest field in recent years accompanied by the ever lurking dark horse that is Ron (Re-Open Nominations – a contrarian union movement). Ron brings the total of voting options to six.

Also running against McNally is Cathal Horgan, an engineering student and a committee member of Fianna Fáil's Trinity Wolfe Tone Cumman; Amy Kennedy, LGBT rights officer for TCDSU and campaign manager of the nearly successful Ron campaign against O'Leary last year; Tadhg Ó Néil, a supporter of the Freedom4Students movement; and second-year student Jonathan Hoffman.

McNally has proven herself to be a slick political operator in her ascension to the role of TCDSU president. She is also no stranger to on-the-ground activism, taking part in the pro-Palestine port blockade in Dublin last year. If she succeeds in the campaign for re-election, she will have a full term to put herself on the map as a student leader.

Let us hope she does not develop the same "dictatorial tendencies" as her predecessor.