An important note regarding the background of NUS-USI

The National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI) was established in 1972 under a unique arrangement where both the British and Irish national student unions, the National Union of Students (NUS) and Union of Students in Ireland (USI) respectively, jointly organised in Northern Ireland to promote student unity across the sectarian divide.

In 2018 NUS-USI is the recognised voice of students in Northern Ireland at a national (NUS, USI) and international (European Students’ Union) level.

The agreed mission of NUS-USI is
- to promote, extend and defend the rights of students; and
- to develop and champion strong students’ unions.

The vision of NUS-USI includes the promotion of social justice and respect for human rights.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Students are harmed by the lack of access to abortion services in Northern Ireland because they must travel abroad to access abortion or risk prosecution by self-aborting with pills. Young people between 20 and 29 are the most common groups travelling from Northern Ireland to England to access abortion. International students and students from Great Britain lose the right to access abortion services when they register with a GP in Northern Ireland.

2. Students support the decriminalisation of abortion and want abortion to be accessible in Northern Ireland on a free, safe, legal and local basis. This is demonstrated by the policy positions of NUS-USI and some of our member unions.

3. Students’ views on abortion have evolved significantly in recent years: this can be seen in the histories of our students’ unions (see below). From the 1970s to the 1990s, abortion rights campaigning within the Northern Ireland student movement was limited to a core group of activists. Now it is widely recognised as a student rights issue and pro-choice demonstrations are well-attended by students. Queen’s University Belfast Students’ Union now holds a position firmly in favour of decriminalising abortion, following many years of back and forth on the topic.

4. Access to abortion is a class issue and therefore a student issue. Many students in Northern Ireland are below the age of 25 and live on low incomes. This has meant that safe but illegal abortions are often the only financially viable option for students who wish to end a pregnancy.
5. Students and young people cannot seek the advice of their local GP regarding abortion, therefore they often turn to students’ union officers for advice. The criminalisation of abortion and the Criminal Law (Northern Ireland) Act 1967 puts student officers in a difficult position when providing confidential support to students with crisis pregnancies and signposting them to other organisations.

6. The harms of a lack of abortion services in Northern Ireland are compounded by poor sex education, abortion stigma and a lack of access to aftercare due to the fear of criminalisation.

7. Members of the women’s movement in the 1970s-1990s recall that backstreet abortion was taboo but not uncommon among working class women who could not afford to travel to access abortion. A 21-year-old woman died from septicaemia following a backstreet abortion in Belfast in 1979. In 2018, illegal abortions continue, however the typical method used since the early 2000s (early medical abortion with pills) is safe.

How attitudes to abortion within the NI student movement have changed

National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI)

Membership: over 200,000 further and higher education students across Northern Ireland

There is a limited archive of abortion rights activism by NUS-USI officers and members between 1972 and the mid-2000s. The documents currently available do not do justice to the extent of NI student activism on abortion in this period and must be supplemented by oral histories. The following account of NUS-USI history on abortion rights campaigning is based on a review of a small archive of papers dating back to 1997, informal interviews with NUS-USI staff members and elected officers, and the Linenhall Library ‘Divided Society’ archive.

NUS-USI staff and former elected officers recall that there was a strong core group of women students who were passionate about abortion reform in the 1980s and 1990s. It might initially appear from gaps in the archives that the NUS-USI of the 1970s-2000s was less vocal on reproductive rights than its sister unions, but the nature of grassroots activism must be kept in mind. Activists who are focused on campaigning against a particular law or practice (e.g. the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution) concentrate their energy on that campaign and therefore have little time to document the details of their activism.¹ The process of documenting activist work has become easier with access to the internet and social media. Archiving activist work from the 1970s to the early 1990s was a much more labour intensive and expensive process, it is therefore unsurprising that there are few public records available of student activism on abortion rights in Northern Ireland from this period. I must emphasise that the scarcity of written records does not mean that abortion rights activism by students did not happen in Northern Ireland: this is why I refer to oral histories.

At several points in the history of NUS-USI, the organisation has had to focus its campaigning resources on challenging education policy changes such as reviews of higher

¹ Most abortion rights activism in NI in the late 20th century took place outside the political sphere. Anti-choice protesters targeted the Brook Clinic and Family Planning Association, making progress on reproductive rights feel impossible: Jennifer Thomson, Abortion Law and Political Institutions: Explaining Policy Resistance (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p116
education funding, cuts to student bursaries and increases in tuition fees. In periods where access to education was under threat, NUS-USI has had to focus almost exclusively on advocating for students’ interests within further and higher education institutions. This meant that student-led social justice campaigns received less attention in periods of educational policy change e.g. 2008-11.

During the Troubles (1968-1998), NUS-USI campaigned on many complex issues such as housing, sectarianism, community relations and opposition to tuition fees. The relatively low profile of abortion rights campaigning within written histories of the first three decades of NUS-USI might also be the result of the disruptive nature of civil conflict. Civil society campaigns in the 1970s-1990s on domestic and sexual violence, LGBT+ rights and access to abortion were often overshadowed by the fallout of the Troubles. It could also be true that abortion rights attracted comparatively little attention beyond a core group of students because student politics has, at times, mirrored the dynamics of parliamentary politics at Stormont and Westminster in regarding the question of abortion reform as a controversial issue.

Staff and former elected officers recall that members of NUS-USI were passionate about campaigning against the insertion of the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution in 1983. During the early 1990s, student activists in Northern Ireland actively supported USI, Trinity College and University College Dublin Students’ Union (TCDSU and UCDSU) student officers who were sued in the Republic of Ireland for providing information on accessing an abortion in England. In solidarity with the USI, TCDSU and UCDSU activists, Northern students printed leaflets containing the abortion information at the centre of **SPUC v Grogan** injunction and sold t-shirts bearing the phone number of the abortion information line in Queen’s Students Union shop. Students also attended a demonstration in support of the arrival of a Brook clinic Belfast in 1992. Brook was accused by conservative religious groups of ‘bringing abortion by the back door’.

NUS-USI adopted a pro-choice policy calling for abortion law reform in Northern Ireland at an extraordinary conference in 2008. It is not entirely clear from the NUS-USI archives whether NUS-USI had already adopted a pro-choice position before 2008. Staff and former elected officers suggest this may have been the case. Between 2009 and 2012, a vocal group of students and elected students’ union officers opposed NUS-USI’s decision to take a position on abortion, arguing that taking a side in the abortion reform debate is as controversial as adopting a position on the constitutional question. This view was rejected by the NUS-USI membership by democratic vote.

From 2008 onwards, individual NUS-USI presidents and women’s officers have supported external pro-choice campaigns such as the Amnesty International **My Body, My Rights** campaign and the Alliance for Choice **Trust Women** campaign. In recent years

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7 The clinic was recently renamed Common Youth. ‘Demonstration in support of Brook Centre’, **Unity**, Vol. 3, No. 44 (December 1991); ‘Abortion by the “back door”: Brook means abortion’, **Alert** (July 1992). D.S. archive.
NUS-USI has frequently shared press releases responding to developments around abortion law in Northern Ireland including court judgments and debates at Stormont, highlighting that a lack of access to abortion services is a student issue.\(^8\)

NUS-USI actively campaigned alongside USI to repeal the Eighth Amendment between 2016 and 2018. In April 2018, NUS-USI President Olivia Potter-Hughes and Women’s Officer-elect Rachel Watters created a campaign in solidarity with USI to support repeal of the Eighth Amendment. The *Home to V8te* campaign (see Appendix A) mobilised Irish vote-eligible students studying at UK universities and colleges to return home to vote in the referendum on the Eighth Amendment. NUS Women’s Officer Hareem Ghani gathered funding from NUS to create *Home to V8te* travel bursaries: a total of 136 students received travel bursaries in May 2018 to enable them to travel to vote in the referendum. NUS-USI members attended USI training events on pro-choice campaigning and NUS-USI President Olivia Potter-Hughes attended numerous *Students for Choice* events to support a Yes vote in the 2018 referendum.

NUS-USI women’s officers have worked closely with member unions in Northern Ireland, the NUS Women’s Campaign and external student feminist groups in Great Britain to raise awareness of the lack of abortion access in Northern Ireland (and the Republic of Ireland).

NUS-USI Women’s Conference unanimously passed a motion in favour of the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland and the removal of barriers to abortion access (see Appendix B) in February 2018. This policy was ratified by NUS-USI Conference in March 2018 and strengthened NUS-USI’s existing pro-choice stance. In September 2018, NUS-USI launched its first abortion rights campaign called ‘Trust Us’ (see Appendix C). NUS-USI officers and committee members regularly attend pro-choice demonstrations and events across Northern Ireland. The NUS-USI membership is supportive of the organisation’s firm commitment to campaigning for free, safe, legal and local access to abortion.

**Queen’s University Belfast Students’ Union (QUBSU)**

*Membership: 23,850 undergraduate and postgraduate students (2016/17)*

Queen’s University Belfast Students’ Union was established in 1966 when two single-sex student representative groups merged to form a single union. Unlike many students’ unions in Great Britain, QUBSU did not support the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act for most of the past 50 years, despite the activism of women student campaigners. From the mid 1980s to 2015, the union’s position on abortion varied from anti-choice (or ‘pro-life’) to pro-choice depending on the prevailing opinion of students and elected officers.

The fact that abortion rights were a source of contention within QUBSU before 2015 is perhaps explained by the historic role of the union as a training ground for Northern Irish politicians.\(^9\) Many current and former MLAs and Northern Irish MPs were elected to the Students’ Union Council or sabbatical officer positions while studying at Queen’s. Many (but not all) students engaged in QUBSU politics are to some extent affiliated with Northern Irish political parties. Student debates on abortion rights have been strongly influenced by party-affiliated students who share their parties’ views on abortion reform. Until recently, the 5 largest political parties in Northern Ireland have either avoided discussion of abortion law reform or actively opposed it.\(^10\)


\(^9\) Pete Hodson, ‘Conversation with Dominic Doherty, Deputy Director of QUBSU’, The Gown (3 March 2015)
For many years, QUBSU was polarised along political party and community affiliation (CNR/PUL) lines.\(^\text{11}\) From the 1970s to 2015, opposition to abortion law reform united socially conservative students with divergent community backgrounds. MP Ian Paisley referenced this dynamic at an address to the Presbyterian Assembly in 1990.\(^\text{12}\) Pro-choice women student campaigners have always operated on a cross-community basis.

From the 1970s to 2015, small but dedicated groups of students campaigned on abortion rights and provided advice within the Students’ Union on accessing abortion (see ‘The implications for students of lack of access to abortion services’ below). The QUBSU position on abortion was intensely debated between 2010 and 2015. The union’s position flipped between pro-choice (May 2012), neutrality on abortion (December 2012) and in favour of limited abortion reform (2015) depending on the views of the elected sabbatical officers and the composition of the Students’ Union Council. These debates were influenced in part by the stances of Northern Irish political parties and the emerging campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland.

During the period of neutrality on abortion within QUBSU (2012-2015), students proposed a motion to Students’ Union Council which argued that the neutrality policy created confusion about what advice the Students’ Union welfare system could give to students experiencing crisis pregnancy. The neutrality policy was perceived by some students as a mechanism for anti-choice student officers to maintain the status quo and suppress discussion of abortion rights. Things came to a head around USI Congress 2013, when a student delegate from QUBSU was publicly disciplined by the Union’s Executive Management Committee for voting in favour of a pro-choice motion at a national conference.\(^\text{13}\) It could be argued that some QUBSU sabbatical officers implemented the policy of neutrality on abortion in order to obstruct pro-choice campaigning by QUB students on a local and national level between 2012 and 2015.

A tipping point in QUBSU’s position on abortion rights came in 2015 when the Students’ Union Council approved a motion to support Amnesty International’s My Body, My Rights campaign. The union’s position on abortion consequently changed from neutrality to support for limited abortion law reform. In 2016, the Students’ Union Council approved a policy calling for an extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. This policy changed in 2017 when the Students’ Union Council approved a motion that mandated QUBSU to campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion. Students proposing the decriminalisation motion stated that the 1967 Abortion Act was not fit for purpose and decriminalisation was necessary to deliver access to abortion in Northern Ireland for vulnerable groups. (Neither NUS-USI, QUBSU nor UUSU support the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act for reasons set out on Appendix C, in the section titled “Why decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland?”.)

In August 2017, 3 QUBSU sabbatical officers wore ‘Repeal’ jumpers (in support of the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment) to a prominent event at Queen’s University attended by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar. During a question and answer session, one of the officers asked the Taoiseach about the timing of the referendum on the Eighth Amendment and asked that the vote be held at a time when students would be in the

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\(^\text{11}\) CNR = Catholic/Nationalist/Republican; PUL = Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist; Pete Hodson, ‘Conversation with Dominic Doherty, Deputy Director of QUBSU’, The Gown (3 March 2015)


QUBSU launched its first major pro-choice campaign, Project Choice, in October 2017. Project Choice consists of a group of students (called ‘Choice Ambassadors’) from different academic and campaigning perspectives working together to campaign for full access to reproductive healthcare on the island of Ireland for anyone who can become pregnant. The activities of Project Choice involve lobbying to change Northern Ireland’s restrictive abortion laws, myth-busting and holding training workshops for students. QUBSU is home to three other pro-choice student societies: Amnesty International QUB, the Pro-Choice Society and Medical Students for Choice. The latter has organised training in abortion provision for medical students and raised concerns about the lack of training in abortion procedures in Northern Ireland.

Recent pro-choice demonstrations at Queen’s University have been well-attended and supported by students and members of the public (see Appendix D). Sabbatical officers at QUBSU supported and processed students’ applications for travel bursaries as part of NUS-USI’s Home to V8te campaign in May 2018 (see Appendix A). Staff and current student officers believe that the pro-choice position of QUBSU is now firmly embedded.

Ulster University Students’ Union (UUSU)
Membership: 24,640 undergraduate and postgraduate students (2016/17)

Ulster University Students’ Union was established in 1985 and represents students across 4 campuses in Belfast, Jordanstown, Coleraine and Derry. Prior to 2015 UUSU did not take a position on abortion law reform in Northern Ireland, although some students participated in external pro and anti-choice campaigns respectively.

Like other students’ unions on the island of Ireland, UUSU Students’ Union Council adopted a position in favour of limited abortion reform when it voted to support the Amnesty International My Body, My Rights campaign in 2015. UUSU then adopted policy in favour of the full decriminalisation of abortion in 2016, before QUBSU and NUS-USI.

Sabbatical officers at UUSU supported and processed students’ applications for travel bursaries as part of NUS-USI’s Home to V8te campaign in May 2018.

Further Education (FE) colleges

NUS-USI represents more than 150,000 students across all further education colleges in Northern Ireland (see table below).

FE college students’ unions in Northern Ireland typically have tight budgets and cannot afford to develop autonomous campaigns on the same scale as NUS-USI or higher education students’ unions. Belfast Metropolitan College is the largest further education college in Northern Ireland and the only college that has a paid officer role (President) within its students’ union.

Further education college students’ unions have produced many excellent pro-choice activists. FE students have been active in shaping NUS-USI policy in favour of abortion

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reform and have participated in the broader civil society campaign to decriminalise abortion.

Total number of students at FE colleges in NI (all affiliated to NUS-USI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Campus locations</th>
<th>Number of students (enrolments per year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belfast Metropolitan College</td>
<td>5 locations across Belfast</td>
<td>37,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) | • Greenmount  
• Enniskillen  
• Loughry | 1,800                                   |
| North West Regional College        | • Derry  
• Limavady  
• Strabane | 10,000                                  |
| Northern Regional College          | • Ballymena (2 campuses)  
• Ballymoney  
• Coleraine  
• Larne  
• Magherafelt  
• Newtownabbey | 13,652                                  |
| South Eastern Regional College     | • Ballynahinch  
• Bangor  
• Downpatrick  
• Lisburn  
• Newcastle  
• Newtownards  
• Carrowdore  
• Holywood | 31,199                                  |
| South West College                 | • Cookstown  
• Dungannon  
• Enniskillen  
• Omagh | 24,215                                  |
| Southern Regional College          | • Armagh  
• Banbridge  
• Kilkeel  
• Lurgan  
• Newry  
• Portadown | 34,000                                  |
| **TOTAL**                          |                                           | **151,866**                             |

The implications for students of the lack of access to abortion services

The NUS-USI Trust Us campaign briefing concisely explains why abortion is a student issue (i.e. an issue concerning students’ rights and welfare) in Northern Ireland (see “Why is access to abortion a student issue?", Appendix C pages 5-6). The implications of the lack of access to abortion that apply to young people and people on low incomes naturally apply to students, who often belong to both of these groups. The following account will describe the issues discussed in the Trust Us briefing in greater detail, in order to reflect oral histories gathered from current and former elected student officers, including my own experience as a pro-choice student activist at Queen’s University Belfast and Women’s Officer at NUS-USI.

For as long as Northern Irish students’ unions have had student welfare systems, students with crisis pregnancies have approached officers for information on accessing abortion. Students often approach officers about their pregnancy because they do not feel safe to tell their GP or family members that they intend to end their pregnancy. This
fact is well known within the NI student and women’s movements but rarely written about because abortion stigma casts a wide net and officers often fear that supporting students in crisis might attract the attention of anti-choice protesters or the police. We are conscious of section 5 of the Criminal Law (Northern Ireland) Act 1967, which creates a legal duty to report knowledge of a crime. This law puts student officers in a very difficult position in a region where abortion is almost completely illegal.

Student officers (particularly those in welfare or women’s officer roles) regularly receive messages or calls out of the blue from students asking for information on how to access an abortion in Northern Ireland. Officers will provide non-directive support to students seeking an abortion by signposting them to sources of further information such as the Abortion Support Network or Alliance for Choice websites. Although it is not illegal to provide information on abortion in Northern Ireland, the criminalisation of abortion makes officers and students’ unions very cautious to share direct links to websites where abortion pills can be ordered. NUS-USI has decided to share a list of relevant organisations in the Trust Us briefing (“If you need an abortion in Northern Ireland”, Appendix C, pages 9-11), so that any student or officer can use this list for themselves or to support someone else. We know from the anonymous stories shared by the Abortion Support Network that people with crisis pregnancies may engage in self-harm to try to end a pregnancy. We want to help prevent this by providing students with information on how to access safe abortion if they need to. We trust students to know for themselves whether they feel able to continue a pregnancy and when asked, we will signpost them to organisations that can provide support.

Student officers of the 1970s-1990s referred students asking for abortion information to telephone directories printed on the back of local women’s publications. These included the telephone numbers for the Ulster Pregnancy Advisory Association, the Family Planning Association and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. These directories sometimes included the telephone numbers for abortion clinics in England.

Young people between the ages of 20 and 29 are the most common overall category of people travelling from Northern Ireland to England to access abortion services. Aiken et al report that Women on Web supplied abortion pills to 1,438 women in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in 2015. Women on Web have reported receiving daily requests for help from women across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The rise in people travelling from Northern Ireland to England for abortion since the introduction of the new funding scheme suggests a link between access to abortion services and socioeconomic class.

International students and students from Great Britain often do not realise that

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17 ‘Meet the pro-choice crusader changing the lives of women’, Marie Claire (24 March 2017) <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/reports/abortion-support-network-changing-lives-486221> (accessed 9 December)
20 Abigail Aiken and others, ‘Self reported outcomes and adverse events after medical abortion through online telemedicine: population based study in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland’, BMJ (2017), 357
abortion is not accessible in Northern Ireland until after they arrive. Jo Gowers, NUS-USI Women’s Officer 2015-16, wrote in 2016:

“One month after I turned eighteen, I moved to Belfast in Northern Ireland for university. I have no doubt in my mind that it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I will leave Belfast after graduating with the belief, legally speaking at least, it is the worst place in the UK to be a woman. When I moved there, I quickly learnt that abortions were hugely restricted in NI. As a Christian I’m unsure if I would ever want an abortion, but I never imagined still living in the UK and it not being available. By the end of first year I had also learnt that by registering to a GP surgery here I lost my right to an abortion from the NHS in England too.”

Hamsavani Rajeswaren, an international alumna of Queen’s University Belfast and the current Equality and Diversity Officer at QUBSU, wrote earlier this year:

“It is not uncommon for international students to fall pregnant during the course of their studies – both undergraduates and postgraduates. The troubling this is that very often, it’s only upon finding out that they are pregnant that these students find out that they are unable to access reproductive healthcare here should they wish to. To make matters worse, the criminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland also means that they are unable to receive advice from their healthcare providers, or university.

These are incredibly vulnerable students that we are talking about. They have no family here, no one to support them, or show them where to go or what to do in the event of a crisis pregnancy. Should they have to travel for an abortion, that’s an added financial burden that they would have to bear on top of the already extortionate costs of their education. Some of these students may also come from incredibly conservative cultures and/or religions and families, so they can’t contact their family for financial and emotional support regarding having an abortion. Even if they did procure the funds to travel for an abortion and go through with the procedure, they wouldn’t necessarily have the support and after care that a home student would be able to access with ease.

[...] The UKVI rules that international students are bound by, only allow them a leave of absence of up to 60 days (or fewer in many circumstances, depending on the immigration status, type of visa, course of study, sponsorship – the list goes on). While up to 50 weeks of maternity leave is granted to domestic students at QUB, for international students, our visa rules supersede this. The only way an international student can take time off their course for longer than 60 days is to terminate their visa and leave the country, then reapply for a visa when they are ready to return to their studies. This is far from a solution to a crisis pregnancy – where an international student is forced to leave the country to access an abortion, or leave the country to go home and have the child and be faced with the financial implications of travel, visas, not to mention healthcare and consequently childcare. This coupled with the complicated conservative cultural and religious norms some students may come from puts them in a very vulnerable situation.

UKVI’s current visa regulations are limiting and not fit for purpose. They don’t take into account pregnancies as is. Let alone in the case of students in the North of

Ireland, where the law demands that they stay pregnant, but international student visa rules don’t allow them to take the necessary maternity leave should they carry on with the pregnancy. We are putting our international students in vulnerable positions, by failing to provide them the vital support they need in situations like this. Becoming pregnant, or caring for a child should not become a barrier to anyone’s education.”

The new funding scheme to provide access to free abortion care on the NHS for people from Northern Ireland will not necessarily cover international students or students from Great Britain who have to travel outside Northern Ireland for an abortion. The scheme eligibility requirements exclude people who do not reside in Northern Ireland. It is unclear whether students whose family homes are outside Northern Ireland will meet the residency requirement, therefore students who become pregnant while studying in Northern Ireland might have to pay privately for abortion care if they travel to England. In these circumstances, an early medical abortion with pills ordered online is the most financially accessible option.

Anti-choice legislators or activists might claim that the law prevents people from having abortions. Student officers know from experience that the law does not prevent abortion, it sustains a status quo where a safe but illegal abortion with pills is often the only abortion that a young person in Northern Ireland can access. Young people, including students, have always had illegal abortions in Northern Ireland. In June 1979, a 21-year-old woman from Sandy Row named Charlotte Hutton died following a backstreet abortion. Marie Therese McGivern observed in 1980 that “it is likely that Northern Ireland has a significant backstreet [abortion] business”. McGivern describes a pattern in the 1970s and 1980s that student officers and pro-choice activists see today: it is young people and working class people with little money and support that have no option but to rely on illegal abortion. Geraldine Quigley wrote of illegal abortions taking place in South Belfast in 1992. The difference between the situation today and the death of Charlotte Hutton in 1979 is that an early medical abortion with pills – the typical method of illegal abortion in Northern Ireland in 2018 – is safe.

Abortion stigma, poor sex education and limited access to aftercare further compound the negative impact of the lack of access to abortion. Many young people in Northern Ireland have received sex education via religious providers that promote abstinence and demonise contraception and abortion. When they enter adult sexual

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30 Abigail Aiken and others, 'Self reported outcomes and adverse events after medical abortion through online telemedicine: population based study in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland', BMJ (2017), 357
relationships during college or university, students raised with poor sex education have very little knowledge of how to deal with a crisis pregnancy. The criminalisation of abortion deters students from accessing aftercare following an illegal early medical abortion with pills. The recent prosecutions of a 21-year-old woman and a mother who procured abortion pills for her 15-year-old daughter are a reminder that it is not safe to disclose an abortion to either medical professionals or housemates.\(^{32}\)

The law on abortion in Northern Ireland has harmed thousands of students and young people over the last 50 years by forcing them to travel to access abortion or risk prosecution or health complications by having an illegal abortion. Increasing numbers of students from outside Northern Ireland are coming here to study: the current abortion law strips those students of the bodily autonomy they had in their home countries and leaves them with very little support if they fall pregnant in a new country. The current law on abortion has a negative impact on student welfare and can harm individual students’ academic performance by forcing them to miss class to travel for an abortion, or to have an illegal abortion by taking abortion medication without medical supervision.

NUS-USI will fight alongside its member unions and fellow abortion reform campaigners to achieve reproductive justice for anyone who can become pregnant in Northern Ireland, for as long as is necessary. Regarding abortion law reform in Northern Ireland, NUS-USI recommends that

(i) abortion be completely decriminalised; and

(ii) measures be introduced to ensure that abortion services are available on a free, safe, legal and local basis to anyone in Northern Ireland who needs them.

December 2018

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\(^{32}\) ‘Girl “taken from classroom to be questioned by police over abortion pills”’, *Belfast Telegraph* (6 November 2018) <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/girl-taken-from-classroom-to-be-questioned-by-police-over-abortion-pills-37497844.html> (accessed 9 December 2018);
APPENDICES

Appendix A: ‘Home to V8te’ campaign materials
Appendix B: Current NUS-USI policy on abortion
Appendix C: NUS-USI ‘Trust Us’ campaign briefing
Appendix D: Images of pro-choice demonstrations at Queen’s University Belfast, 2018
APPENDIX A

‘Home to V8te’ campaign materials, April 2018

i. NUS Connect website, ‘#HomeToV8te – support the right to choose in Ireland’, 24th April 2018 <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/hometov8te> (Accessed 7th December 2018)

See screenshots below:
ii. ‘Home to V8te’ campaign briefing, April 2018

(see next 4 pages)
#HomeToV8te
On 25 May 2018, the people of the Republic of Ireland will have an historic opportunity to change Ireland’s strict abortion laws, which are currently upheld in the Eighth Amendment of the Irish constitution. This guide is designed to help students’ unions across the UK support Irish students to travel home to vote in the referendum and #RepealThe8th.

The right to choose
NUS supports the right to choose. This right is currently denied to pregnant people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, who travel in their thousands to access abortion in the UK every year. More Irish students move to the UK for third level education than any other state outside the Republic of Ireland.

What’s the issue?
Abortion is currently criminalised and extremely difficult to access in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, the process involved in changing the law is different in each jurisdiction.

The law criminalising abortion in Northern Ireland - the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act - can be reformed by the ordinary legislative process in Northern Ireland Assembly, or the UK Parliament under direct rule. No referendum is required. Polls and surveys consistently demonstrate that a majority of people in Northern Ireland, regardless of their party political affiliation, support abortion reform.

In the Republic of Ireland (RoI), the process is different. The Eighth Amendment of the Irish constitution prohibits abortion, and as any change to the Irish constitution must be approved by referendum, the Irish government must hold a referendum to determine whether the amendment will be repealed.

NUS-USI has long campaigned for abortion reform in Northern Ireland, and is also committed to working alongside USI (Union of Students in Ireland) to campaign for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment.
#HomeToV8te

The #HomeToV8te campaign aims to get Irish students studying in UK and Northern Ireland institutions to travel home to vote in the referendum on the Eighth Amendment on Friday 25th May. More information can be found at www.HomeToVote.com

What is the Eighth Amendment?

The Constitution of Ireland is the primary source of law in Ireland and can only be changed by a public vote in a referendum. As a result of a referendum in 1983, Article 40.3.3, known as the Eighth Amendment, was inserted into the Irish constitution:

‘The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.’

In 1992 another referendum added text to Article 40.3.3 (13th and 14th Amendments). This resulted from what is known as the ‘x’ case which involved a 14-year-old girl who became pregnant as a result of rape and was refused the right to travel abroad for an abortion.

The purpose of the 13th and 14th Amendments is to allow access to information about abortion and the right to travel so that women from Ireland can leave the country to get abortion care abroad. An additional amendment that sought to prevent suicide as a reason for accessing abortion was rejected by the Irish electorate in 2002.

What Article 40.3.3 means for pregnant people in Ireland

In law a pregnant person and their pregnancy are treated as two separate lives, of equal importance, with separate rights. A pregnant person in Ireland therefore has limited options.

The amendment does not allow for a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest to be terminated. If the developing baby has a serious condition and will die in the womb, the pregnancy cannot be terminated with the support of their own doctor at home in Ireland.

A hospital may only provide abortion care in Ireland if continuing the pregnancy poses a risk to the life of a pregnant person, otherwise healthcare treatment must be delayed or denied. If the person decides to end their pregnancy, the Irish constitution only allows abortion care for those able to travel with the relevant travel documentation.

As a result, an increasing number of people order abortion pills over the Internet without the help or advice of their doctor. These people are currently breaking the law and face a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

What does the proposed new amendment say?

The Irish government has proposed to remove article 40.3.3, and insert a new clause stating “Provision may be made by law for the regulation of termination of pregnancies”. This would be known as the 36th Amendment.

If the public vote yes, the absolute constitutional ban on abortion in Ireland will be removed. This will allow the government to legislate for access to abortion care in Ireland.

Does the Eighth Amendment save lives?

People campaigning to retain the Eighth Amendment claim that Irish law ‘saves lives’. However...

Fact: There is no record of the numbers of people leaving the country for abortion or importing pills from abroad. There is no way of
knowing how many people have been prevented from having abortions.

**Fact:** Legal restrictions on abortion care do not lead to fewer abortions. Introducing laws to allow abortion do not lead to an increase in the number of women needing abortion care (World Health Organisation).

**Fact:** There is no link between fertility rates in European countries and their laws on abortion. For example, abortion is accessible and legal in France, and on average people in France have more children than people in Ireland (Eurostat).

**Fact:** Abortion is legal and happens in Irish hospitals but only when the pregnant person’s life is directly at risk if they continue with the pregnancy. In 2017, 25 abortions were recorded in Irish hospitals for this reason.

**Fact:** The constitution also allows people to have abortions outside of Ireland. This limits access to those who can afford to travel and have the necessary documentation to safely leave the country and return. For someone who has to leave the country, there is no continuity of care from their doctor. Abortions also tend to happen later owing to necessary delays in making financial, travel and care arrangements.

**Fact:** Banning abortion does not reduce the need for care. The best way to reduce need is through accessible, affordable contraception and education. If the public vote yes and the planned legislation becomes law, abortion care will:

- be safe and legal
- happen earlier in a the pregnancy
- happen in Ireland
- happen under the care of the person’s own doctor.

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**How can students’ unions support the decriminalisation of abortion in RoI?**

Students’ unions can help to repeal the 8th by launching a HometoV8te campaign on your campus. You can:

- Promote [www.hometovote.com](http://www.hometovote.com) via your website and social media channels.
- Work with your institution to ensure that Irish students at your institution are aware of the referendum.
- Encourage your students to support #HomeToV8te on social media.
- Encourage Irish students to share their reasons for going #HomeToV8te among their peers.
- Set up a #HomeToV8te stall in a high-traffic area of your SU/college providing information about the campaign. Ensure that any students who are Irish citizens are aware of the referendum and how to vote in it if they are registered. Explain to non-Irish students how they can show solidarity with their Irish counterparts and the campaign to repeal the 8th.
- If you are in a position to do so, consider setting up a travel fund to assist registered students to get #HomeToV8te.
- Work with interested student societies to fundraise for [Alliance for Choice](https://www.allianceforchoice.com) and the [Abortion Support Network](http://www.abortion-support-network.org) (a charity helping people from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to travel for abortion care).

NB: Please be mindful of charity law in relation to students’ unions campaigning and fundraising. The issue of societies raising money for another charity is generally accepted if it is clear what the fundraising is for and what

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Northern Ireland national union of students
other usual safeguards are in place. The risk of the union itself using funds is more complex, although may be possible if there is a clear link for members of the union. The fact in this case the referendum is in a separate sovereign state is clearly a factor. See our Guidance on political activity in relation to students’ unions for more information. For specific guidance please contact Peter.Robertson@nus.org.uk

Referendum FAQs

Q. When is the referendum taking place?
A. Polling day is Friday 25 May 2018.

Q. Who can vote in the referendum?
A. Irish citizens over 18 years on polling day and on the Electoral Register. Under Section 11 (3) of the Electoral Act 1992, Irish citizens overseas may retain full voting rights for a period of 18 months, should they intend to return to Ireland within that timeframe.

This means you are eligible to vote if you are an Irish citizen who has lived in the Republic of Ireland in the last 18 months.

Students can check that they are registered here.

Q. What about students not on the register?
A. Eligible voters who are not on the register can apply for inclusion on the supplementary by completing the relevant form here. However applications must be received in person at a local Garda office by Tuesday 8 May 2018.

Q. Can students vote by post?
A. Yes, however only if you are already on the electoral register. Postal vote application form PVS2 can be downloaded here.

Applications must be received by the local authority by Saturday 28 April.
You can find more details at www.checktheregister.ie

Q. Where will voting take place?
A. Polling cards will be issued to every person registered to vote in the referendum. These will provide details of where to vote. Ideally polling cards, along with photo ID, should be taken to the polling station. Polling will take place between 7am and 10pm.

Keep in touch

We would love to hear about #HomeToV8te on your campus.

Please share your stories about what you are doing to encourage Irish students to register to vote and go home to vote on 25 May to repeal the 8th by contacting campaigns@nus.org.uk.
APPENDIX B


DECRIMINALISATION OF ABORTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Conference notes the following:

1. Abortion is available in Northern Ireland only where there is a risk to the life or long term mental or physical health of the pregnant person, which excludes cases where there is fatal foetal abnormality, or a pregnancy as a result of sexual crime. In most circumstances, abortion is a criminal offence punishable by a maximum sentence of life imprisonment under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. The 1967 Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland.

2. On 10 February 2016, the Northern Ireland Assembly voted against reform to allow lawful access to abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and sexual crime. As a result, the abortion law in Northern Ireland remains the most restrictive in Europe and incompatible with minimum human rights standards.

3. The Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service has initiated criminal proceedings under sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act for unlawful procurement of abortion and abortifacient medications in a minimum of three separate cases since 2016. An April 2016 case resulted in a suspended sentence of 3 months’ imprisonment, and in January 2017 a couple received formal cautions for attempting to procure an abortion with Mifepristone and Misoprostol.

4. In October 2017, the Department for Women and Equalities announced that it would cover the cost of treatment for pregnant persons who travel from Northern Ireland to England for abortion care. As a result, pregnant persons lawfully resident in Northern Ireland will now be offered free abortions at the point of access if they travel to England to exert that right.

5. Scotland’s Chief Medical Officer announced in October 2017 that she will enable persons, for whom it is clinically appropriate, to take Misoprostol to complete an abortion at home. This change brings Scotland in line with French and Swedish health policy, which allows patients to take one or both abortion pills at home.

Conference further notes with great concern that:

1. In early 2017 the PSNI implemented a crackdown on the procurement of Mifepristone and Misoprostol to induce abortion.

2. These medications appear on the World Health Organisation's list of essential medicines and are already used in NI hospitals for miscarriage management and a very limited number of lawful medical abortions. However, Mifepristone and Misoprostol are regarded as ‘poison’ under the 1861 OAPA for the purpose of criminalising abortion.

3. Although people who travel from Northern Ireland to England to access a termination are eligible to receive free abortion care on the NHS as of November 2017, the cost and logistics of arranging transport, accommodation, time off work and childcare continue to present practical barriers to accessing abortion outside Northern Ireland.

4. Obtaining an early medical abortion by purchasing abortion pills online is a method of abortion which is frequently relied upon by persons who face additional barriers when travelling to access abortion, or find it impossible to travel altogether. Victims and survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities and people with caring
responsibilities can find themselves in this position.

5. The criminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland deters people from accessing aftercare, for fear of being reported to the PSNI if they disclose that they induced an abortion with medication.

Conference believes that:

1. Individuals who make the decision to terminate a pregnancy should be supported and cared for in Northern Ireland, rather than disempowered and isolated by having to travel elsewhere to do so.

2. Access to reproductive healthcare is a student welfare issue: students can face crisis pregnancies which have an adverse effect on their personal and academic lives. The inaccessibility of safe and legal abortion in Northern Ireland places an undue burden on these students in an already distressing situation.

3. Abortion should be governed by the same robust regulatory and ethical frameworks as all other medical procedures.

Conference thus resolves:

1. To campaign for reproductive justice for all and the removal of barriers to abortion access in Northern Ireland.

2. To work with organisations such as Alliance for Choice and Gender Jam in advocating for abortion reform in a manner which is inclusive of women, trans men, non-binary and gender fluid people.

3. To support the introduction of legislation which supersedes Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and has the effect of ensuring full decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.

4. NUS-USI Women's Conference will support legislation to decriminalise all aspects of abortion healthcare, including: to save the life of the pregnant person, to preserve physical and mental health, in cases of sexual crime, where there is a diagnosis of a fatal foetal abnormality, for socio-economic reasons, and at the request of the pregnant person.

5. To support the campaign for reproductive justice and decriminalisation of abortion worldwide.
Trust Us

The student-led campaign for free, safe, legal and local abortion services in Northern Ireland

October 2018
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Why decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland?

Why NUS-USI is calling for change
Abortion is currently available in Northern Ireland only where there is a risk to the life or long term mental or physical health of the pregnant person, which excludes cases where there is a fatal foetal abnormality or a pregnancy resulting from sexual crime. In most circumstances, abortion is a criminal offence punishable by a maximum sentence of life imprisonment under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (OAPA).

Keeping abortion illegal in Northern Ireland does not stop Northern Irish/Irish people in the North of Ireland from having abortions. It simply makes abortion less safe and more difficult to access. At least three people have to travel or take safe but illegal abortion pills in the North of Ireland every single day.

The criminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland deters people from accessing aftercare, for fear of being reported to the PSNI if they disclose that they induced an abortion with medication. In 2015 1,438 women and pregnant people in NI purchased abortion pills online from just one provider (Women on Web).

In February 2018 CEDAW urged the UK government as the state party to act urgently to reform the abortion law in Northern Ireland as the law currently constitutes a grave violation of human rights. Polls and surveys consistently demonstrate that a majority of people in Northern Ireland, regardless of their party-political affiliation, support abortion reform.

Our campaign objectives
We believe that access to abortion is a human right and that the bodily autonomy of every pregnant person should be respected.

We are calling on the Westminster Parliament to legislate for free, safe, legal and local abortion services in Northern Ireland immediately.

We campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion in the North of Ireland and NOT the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act.

We do NOT want a referendum on abortion in Northern Ireland. The law which criminalises abortion in Northern Ireland (the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act) can be reformed by the ordinary legislative process in the Northern Ireland Assembly or the UK Parliament. No referendum is required.

Why decriminalise abortion rather than extending the 1967 Abortion Act?
The 1967 Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland.

NUS-USI calls for the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland rather than the extension of the Abortion Act for a number of reasons:
- The Abortion Act did not decriminalise abortion in Great Britain. The Act simply
provides a legal defence to prosecution under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act for medical professionals who perform abortions.

- Section 1 of the Abortion Act requires two medical professionals to sign off on an abortion procedure. This legal rule does not apply to any other aspect of reproductive healthcare in the UK.
- Subsections (a) to (d) of Section 1 of the Abortion Act effectively pathologise the choice to end a pregnancy. The grounds for abortion under the Act frame the decision to have an abortion exclusively as a matter of health or welfare, regardless of the specific circumstances of the person seeking an abortion.
- NUS-USI believes that abortion should be governed by the same robust regulatory and ethical frameworks as other medical procedures.
- NUS-USI believes that any framework for abortion law reform in the North of Ireland must be inclusive of trans men, as well as non-binary, gender fluid and intersex people. The language of the Abortion Act, which reflects contemporary values and knowledge in 1967, does not meet this standard.
Who is NUS-USI?

Origin of the Northern Ireland student movement
The National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI) was established in 1972 under a unique arrangement where both the British and Irish national student unions, National Union of Students (NUS) and Union of Students in Ireland (USI) respectively, jointly organised in Northern Ireland to promote student unity across the sectarian divide.

The original agreement was revised in 2012. This resulted in the current trilateral agreement which was signed by the presidents of NUS, USI and NUS-USI at an event held at Parliament Buildings, Stormont in 2012 which took place to celebrate 40 years of collaboration between the national unions. The trilateral committee meets three times annually; once in London, once in Dublin and once in Belfast. The committee comprises the presidents of NUS, USI and NUS-USI, and is attended by a manager from each.

NUS-USI's mission and vision
NUS-USI's agreed mission is:
- To promote, extend and defend the rights of students
- To develop and champion strong students' unions

The vision of NUS-USI is to promote social justice and reduce educational inequality where everyone has the right to participate in a society, which respects diversity and human rights.

Every student will play an active part in and be a respected member of a society that values learning, participating with their students’ union locally, and nationally through NUS-USI, which will continue to be the recognised voice of students in Northern Ireland.

NUS-USI represents the interests of around 200,000 students in Northern Ireland and campaigns on their behalf in many different fields such as student hardship, health, prejudice and accommodation.
Abortion law in Northern Ireland as it stands

The 1861 Offences Against the Person Act

Sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 Offences against the Persons Act is the law which still governs abortion in Northern Ireland and makes it illegal not only to have an abortion but also to assist anyone in procuring one. This is punishable by up to life imprisonment.

Abortion has not been decriminalised in England and Wales – the 1967 Abortion Act merely created a loophole which allows abortions to take place with approval from two doctors.

The Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service has initiated criminal proceedings under sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act for unlawful procurement of abortion and abortifacient medications in a minimum of three separate cases since 2016.

An April 2016 case resulted in a suspended sentence of 3 months’ imprisonment, and in January 2017 a couple received formal cautions for attempting to procure an abortion with Mifepristone and Misoprostol. There is an ongoing prosecution against a mother who procured abortifacient medications for her 15-year-old daughter.

In early 2017 the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) implemented a crackdown on the procurement of Mifepristone and Misoprostol to induce abortion. These medications appear on the World Health Organisation’s list of essential medicines and are already used in NI hospitals for miscarriage management and the very limited number of lawful medical abortions. However, Mifepristone and Misoprostol are regarded as ‘poison’ under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act for the purpose of criminalising abortion in Northern Ireland.

In 2013 the Northern Ireland Department of Health issued draft guidelines on medical termination of pregnancy which emphasised that medical professionals will be prosecuted if they perform abortions outside the law. These guidelines have had a chilling effect on medical professionals within the Northern Ireland NHS: the number of abortions performed on the Northern Ireland NHS fell from 51 in 2012/13 to 13 in 2017.
Why is access to abortion a student issue?

Barriers to accessing abortion while studying in Northern Ireland

Students can become pregnant during their studies and their access to reproductive healthcare services, including abortion, can impact their personal and academic lives. Students who need to travel to access abortion services or who take safe but illegal abortion pills at home may have to take time out from their studies which can negatively impact on their academic attendance.

Students who move to Northern Ireland to study sign away their rights to abortion access when they register with a local GP.

Although people who travel from Northern Ireland to England to access a termination are eligible to receive free abortion care on the NHS as of November 2017, the cost and logistics of arranging transport, accommodation, childcare, time off from work and studies continue to present practical barriers to students accessing abortion outside Northern Ireland.

Students who are victims or survivors of abuse, disabled students, students with caring responsibilities, trans and non-binary students and others can face additional barriers to accessing abortion services.

Obtaining an early medical abortion with safe but illegal abortion pills is often the only option for students who face additional barriers when travelling to access abortion or find it impossible to travel altogether. These students are unable to disclose their experiences to friends and family, or access aftercare without risking prosecution. The inherent isolation of this experience can also negatively impact emotional wellbeing.

International students on Tier 4 visas must record their attendance at university to comply with the terms of their visa, which makes it harder for them to travel to access abortion outside the North of Ireland.

Some students can’t travel due to their asylum or refugee status: visa restrictions and a lack of identity documentation can also prevent people from travelling outside Northern Ireland for abortion.

The emotional impact of an unwanted pregnancy in itself can be immensely stressful. Societal stigma regarding crisis pregnancy and abortion may prevent students from disclosing their pregnancy and seeking support, regardless of what choice they make about continuing the pregnancy.

Information regarding abortion services is not available through local health services, leaving students in crisis pregnancy unsure of where to go to seek support.

A lack of access to abortion can impact students in Northern Ireland financially, emotionally and physically. Students often
have very limited financial resources, which can be further strained if they must pay to access abortion either by purchasing medication online or by travelling to another country.

NUS-USI is committed to advocating for free, safe, legal and local abortion access for anyone who needs it, including students.
How you can help

If you are a student or officer in NI
- Join the NUS-USI Trust Us Taskforce by emailing the NUS-USI Women’s Officer at rachel.watters@nistudents.org. The taskforce is a group of students and officers responsible for organising the Trust Us campaign.
- Provide information to students seeking abortion services
- Set up a pro-choice society on your campus
- Create policy in support of decriminalisation of abortion in your students’ union
- Write to your elected representatives to tell them that you support free, safe, legal and local access to abortion
- Volunteer with Alliance for Choice (@All4Choice on Twitter)
- Fundraise for Alliance for Choice or the Abortion Support Network (@AbortionSupport on Twitter)
- Attend pro-choice rallies and talks

If you are a student or officer in Great Britain
- Join the Trust Us campaign mailing list to keep up to date with our campaigning by emailing the NUS-USI Women’s Officer at rachel.watters@nistudents.org
- Encourage students at your institution to take part in our Share Your Story project (see below)
- Educate others on the abortion law in Northern Ireland
- Create UK-wide decriminalisation of abortion policy in your students’ union
- Write to your elected representatives to ask them to support abortion reform at Westminster
- Fundraise for Alliance for Choice or the Abortion Support Network (@All4Choice and @AbortionSupport on Twitter)
- Support the British Pregnancy Advisory Service’s ‘Now for NI’ campaign
- Attend solidarity rallies and fundraisers in your area

If you are a student or officer in the Republic of Ireland
- Join the Trust Us campaign mailing list to keep up to date with our campaigning by emailing the NUS-USI Women’s Officer at rachel.watters@nistudents.org
- Continue the repeal momentum with an active focus on the North
- Write to your TDs to call for access to abortion services for NI residents when post-repeal abortion legislation is introduced in 2019
- Encourage students at your institution to take part in our Share Your Story project (see below)
- Educate others on the abortion law in Northern Ireland
- Create solidarity policy in your students’ union
- Fundraise for the Abortion Rights Campaign or the Abortion Support Network (@freesafelegal and @AbortionSupport on Twitter)
- Come to Belfast to attend rallies, fundraisers and campaign meetings

Campaigning resources
NUS-USI can provide the following written resources on request:
- Template letter to an elected representative
- Template student union policy in favour of the decriminalisation of abortion
- Short guide to setting up a pro-choice society or campaign on campus
- A list of fundraising event ideas

If you would like to access these resources, please email info@nistudents.org with the subject line “Trust Us Resources”.
Share Your Story

NUS-USI are looking for students from across the UK and Ireland to anonymously share their abortion stories in solidarity with students in Northern Ireland who cannot legally access abortion.

We want to create an interactive map of students' unions across the UK and Ireland, filled with anonymous stories of students’ experiences of abortion. The names and identities of these students will remain anonymous and we will attribute the stories to the unions who collected them, only to give geographical context.

The purpose of this solidarity project is to illustrate that access to abortion is a student issue and that students across these islands share many similar experiences in terms of reproductive healthcare.

We also want to highlight that students in Northern Ireland cannot share their abortion stories in this way due to Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. The effect of this law is to make it a crime not to report knowledge of a crime, e.g. abortion, to the police (PSNI). This legal duty would bind NUS-USI to report any students who shared their experiences with us relating to the use of safe but illegal abortion pills.

NUS-USI firmly believe that abortion access is a human right and we need the solidarity of unions in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland to highlight this struggle.

If your union wants to take part in this campaign:

- Brief your students on the purpose of the Share Your Story project and the Trust Us campaign.
- Set up a platform that allows your students to safely disclose their stories anonymously to you.
- Make it clear to participants how their stories will be used and that their personal information will not be included in the interactive map.
- Send anonymous students’ stories to the NUS-USI Women’s Officer at rachel.watters@nistudents.org and make sure you let us know which students’ union you are from!
If you need an abortion in Northern Ireland

The following text is taken in its entirety from the Alliance for Choice website: http://www.alliance4choice.com/i-need-an-abortion-now. This information is included within the Trust Us campaign briefing so that anyone in need of treatment or support can find it.

Option 1: England

If you can travel, please contact BPAS (the British Pregnancy Advisory Service) and they will book you an appointment. You will not need to pay for any of the treatment and if you earn less than £16K or are in receipt of any benefits, they can also help you with travel.

Women from Northern Ireland (NI) can now access free abortion care in England. BPAS operates the booking system for NI women requiring treatment. Telephone the number below to make an appointment with a funded UK abortion provider (BPAS, MSI and NUPAS). You will be offered the most appropriate appointment based on your needs.

To make a booking call 0333 234 2184
To qualify for free care you must:
1. reside in NI (with a BT postcode), and;
2. be registered with a NI GP (with a BT postcode)

You must supply the above detail to receive funded treatment (BPAS will not contact your GP unless you say they can).

Please mention when booking if it is difficult for you to fund the cost of your travel and accommodation. You will be asked to complete a declaration form and BPAS will assess whether you are eligible for help with your expenses.

Option 2: I can’t travel

There are many reasons why some people cannot travel for abortion services and all of these are valid. Don’t worry, there are still ways to access the help you need.

Women Help Women and Women on Web are the only two services we recommend for accessing the abortion pill online as they offer a consultation with support. If you need to access emergency healthcare as you are unsure about bleeding, please do not disclose that you have self-administered pills. They are still illegal for this purpose in NI and medical staff are obliged to report you if they find out. SAY YOU ARE HAVING A MISCARRIAGE. If you need legal help, please call Alliance for Choice on 07894063965.

Women Help Women
https://womenhelp.org/

Information from the Women Help Women website:

1. Fill in the online consultation. It takes about 10 minutes. You will be asked questions about your health to understand whether the medical abortion is safe for you. If it is not, this will be immediately communicated to you in the questionnaire. In addition to a medical abortion, you can request contraceptives.
2. Provide your complete, correct address for the shipment.
3. We will ask you to contribute to a non-profit fund. We suggest a contribution of 75 Euro, but please give more if you can. Your contribution makes sure that this service can survive, and women contacting us in the future can get help too. Your contribution also supports activist projects worldwide that fight for women’s rights, bring information and access.
4. A discrete package will be sent as soon as possible. Delivery times can vary greatly
depending upon your location. Delivery can take from less than 5 days to more than 2 weeks, depending on where you live. Once your consultation is complete, you will be informed about delivery time for your location. You can finish the consultation and write to us to make sure the delivery times are acceptable for your situation. Faster shipping is not possible.

5. You will receive shipping updates and answers to any questions you may have by email. Our online team is ALWAYS there to support you and want to keep in touch with you. Email us at any time to info@womenhelp.org and we will reply as quickly as we can.

IMPORTANT: If you write to us and do not receive a response, or never receive any email after the consultation, please check your SPAM or junk mail box, since sometimes emails are filtered there. This seems to happen most often with Hotmail or Outlook accounts. If you expect an email or response and don’t get it, please write to us, and provide another email address or a telephone number so that we can contact you.

Women on Web
https://www.womenonweb.org/

Information from the Women on Web website: This website refers you to licensed doctor who can provide you with abortion pills. After you complete the following online consultation and if there are no contraindications, the medical abortion (with the pill Mifepristone and Misoprostol) will be delivered to you by post. A medical abortion can be done safely at home as long as you have good information and have access to emergency medical care in the rare case that there are complications.

The doctor can only help you if:
- you live in a country where access to safe abortion is restricted
- you are less than 10 weeks pregnant
- you have no severe illnesses

Before starting the consultation, do a pregnancy test and an ultrasound, if possible. The consultation consists of around 25 questions. All information will remain confidential.

At the end of the consultation you will be asked to make a donation of at least 90, 80 or 70 Euro, depending on the country where you live and your economic circumstances. If you are in a very difficult economic situation, let us know. Please give as much as you can to help other women who are in a similar situation to you but cannot afford to donate anything.

Option 3: I need advice
Abortion Support Network
https://www.asn.org.uk/

Information from the ASN website: Abortion Support Network provides financial assistance and accommodation to patients travelling from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. Funding is available on a case by case basis depending on financial need and availability of funding. Please contact us before booking travel as we can also advise on the least expensive clinics and methods of travel.

We also provide confidential, non-judgmental information to anyone who contacts us via phone or email who is seeking information about travelling to England for an abortion, as well as information about reputable providers of early medical abortion pills by post.

Family Planning Association Northern Ireland

Information from the FPA website: If you’re pregnant and not sure what you want to do and you live in Northern Ireland, FPA can offer:
- non-judgemental and non-directive counselling
- information on all your options to help you decide what to do.

The FPA pregnancy choices counselling service is the only impartial, non-judgmental and non-directive service available in Northern Ireland. The service is completely confidential.
FPA also offer post abortion counselling. Call FPA on 0345 122 8687.

Links and phone numbers

- BPAS: 0333 234 2184
  https://www.bpas.org/abortion-care/considering-abortion/northern-ireland-funded-abortion-treatment/
- Women on Web: https://www.womenonweb.org/en/i-need-an-abortion
- Alliance for Choice: 07894063965 http://www.alliance4choice.com/i-need-an-abortion-now/

ENDS

For further information or to organise meetings or campaigning work connected to the Trust Us campaign, please contact info@nistsudents.org.
APPENDIX D

Images of pro-choice demonstrations at Queen’s University Belfast, 2018

1. Project Choice demonstration on International Women’s Day, 8th March 2018
APPENDIX D (cont.)

2. Amnesty International QUB student action, 26th November 2018