

Union Forum Submission on 1.4 in the TCDSU Constitution

László Molnárfi and Jenny Maguire

We propose to modify the wording of 1.4 in the TCDSU constitution, as we believe it to be a restrictive barrier for the Union to represent students, especially those from marginalized groups, on a political level.

The issue with the current wording concerns problems of culture and structure within the Union.

This document has three parts. Firstly, it describes our proposed amendment to 1.4. Secondly, it compares the current 1.4 to other student unions. Finally, it lists the issue with the current wording of 1.4.

I. Proposal

Current 1.4: The Union shall pursue these objectives independent of any political, racial or religious ideology.

Proposed 1.4 #1: The Union shall not affiliate to any political party, racial or religious organisation.”.

Proposed 1.4 #2: The Union shall pursue these objectives independent of any political party affiliation and of any racial or religious ideology.

Proposed 1.4 #3: The Union shall pursue these objectives independent of any political party and of any racial or religious ideology.

Proposed 1.4 #4: A complete removal of 1.4.

II. Other Unions

Union	Link to Constitution	1.4 equivalent
NUIGSU	https://su.nuigalway.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NUI-Galway-Students-Union-Constitution-May-2018-English-Gaeilge.pdf	Does not have such a line.
UCCSU	https://www.uccsu.ie/your-voice/your-constitution/	“without discrimination and independent of any political or religious organization”.

UCDSU	https://www.ucdsu.ie/ucdsu-constitution	Does not have such a line.
TCDGSU	https://www.tcdgsu.ie/constitution	Does not have such a line.
DCUSU	https://dcustudentlife.ie/su-documents-2	Does not have such a line.
MSUSU	https://www.msu.ie/pageassets/voice/constitution/MSU_Constitution_-_Final_Draft.pdf	“The Union shall practice the above aims and objectives independent of political parties, religious organisations, lobbying groups and in accordance with the law. “
UL Student Life	https://www.ulstudentlife.ie/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2018/08/UL-Student-Life-Constitution.pdf	“The Union shall practice the above aims and objectives independent of any political party or religious organisation.”
TU Dublin SU	https://www.tudublinsu.ie/yourunion/constitution/	“The Union shall practice the above aims independent of political parties, religious organisations, lobbying groups and in accordance with the law.“ and also (as per the explanatory document) “the Union is non party-political”.
CITSU	http://www.citsu.ie/contentfiles/constitution/StudentsUnionConstitution%20Adopted07052020.pdf	The union describes itself in another document as “apolitical” , and also, “A group of members of the Union may put a motion forward seeking support from the Union to enable them to highlight social, economic, environmental or political issues. ” as per the constitution.
IT SLIGO SU	https://itssu.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ITSSU-Constitution	“The Union will strive to be independent of any political

	tution-Mar-2014.pdf	party or religious body (except in so far as may be necessary for the support of a disadvantaged section of society). “
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Other examples include SIPTU, which does not have it and Goldsmiths University SU, (<https://www.goldsmithssu.org/pageassets/yourunion/governance/policiesanddocuments/GSU-CIO-Constitution-effective-8-June-2021.pdf>) which has “The Union shall not affiliate to any political party or religious organisation.”.

III. Issues

It is safe to say that TCDSU’s wording is by far the one that allows the Union to be the most reactionary out of all the others.

The issues with 1.4 in its current form are as follows.

1. If a protest is organized by the PBP TCD, for example, on-campus about student fees, the Union will not go to it due 1.4 , and cannot be made to go. This is absurd.
2. We believe that the original interpretation of 1.4 was that the Union should not affiliate to any political parties. However, due to the creeping depoliticization and institutionalisation of our Unions, the OC/EC and the Unions themselves have become more conservative, and are interpreting it incorrectly.
3. See example of other unions.
4. See in 1969 when the NUS repealed its non-political clause, indicating that there is historical precedent for this.
5. An example of when 1.4 failed to represent students’ welfare was the Irish Times referendum (wherein the proposer was “told” to raise the motion as an LTP, when in fact, this was not necessarily needed), or how we spent an hour discussing repealing the CETA/Migrant Rights motion at Council 2.
6. It is a bureaucratic barrier to the Union protecting students’ needs and an opportunity for a reactionary Union leadership or historical context to neutralize the Union by claiming that everything is political. For example, in 1990, the abortion rights referendum would probably have been claimed as being too political, whereas nowadays in 2021 it is a normal part of protecting student welfare.
 - a. A recent example of this is the Union’s unwillingness to allow a motion to support Students4Change. Regardless of it having matched with the aims of the Union (e.g. to protect student welfare through advocating for more mental health funding), it was claimed that supporting S4C, a student group on-campus, would be too political due to it being Marxist and Anarchist. This is probably the correct interpretation under 1.4.
 - b. Whereas perhaps a broad stroke motion is indeed unwise, none of S4C’s protests (which by themselves are “apolitical”, student protests) were

supported by the Union either. In the Union Forum minutes on the 11th of October (our protest was on the 16th of October 2021), members claim that supporting such a protest would be contrary to 1.4. This encouraged members to vote down a proposal to support the protest. This was, however, false, as even the current 1.4 allows support for specific actions of specific groups, technically even of political parties, or so it was claimed in the #cwrgr Slack chat by the USC Rep. However, the confusion surrounding this, and the unclarity and the fact that many do not know about this, means that a group of people can use it to neutralize the Union's support for certain groups, regardless of whether or not they match the Union's objectives. The OC/EC had no time to step in, and even if they did, maybe their interpretation would have been wildly different, as what is considered "political" or acceptable under 1.4 seems to change every year.

7. The above uncertainty must be avoided and not let to the whims of the OC/EC/Union members to interpret. They can be very well influenced by the ethos of an age, or influenced by interpersonal or cultural factors.
8. Let's take a look at for example the BDS motion, which at the time did not need an LTP (eventually it did go to an LTP as activists gathered signatures from students following the non-LTP motion being voted down at Council). Today, it would probably have been deemed too political for the Union.
9. We need to dispel the myth that just because the Union represents everyone, it cannot be political. A Union by default is political, and as shown by the BDS motion cannot represent 100% of the time the democratic will of 100% of the students. Left-wing ideas, in general, favour students' wellbeing (see e.g. BDS motion), and as such, they should be able to be voted on in the Union.
 - a. The Union is already political. It is liberal. It is the politics of liberal compromise.
10. Following on from the PBP TCD example, let's say that they had a campaign for the abolition of student fees. No one knows whether the Union would be able to support it, as 1.4 is wholly unclear.
11. 1.4 also prevents activists from running for SU positions, as they see the Union as an organisation which would block their initiatives.