Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions

**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
2022-2024**

Addressing the recommendations emerging from the National Surveys of Staff and Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs, January 2022

October 2022

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Background

The actions set out in this implementation plan respond directly to the recommendations which emerged from the National Surveys of Staff and Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs, which were conducted by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) at the request of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, T.D., in April 2021.

The surveys aimed to monitor the experiences of students and staff in relation to sexual violence and harassment, in order to create a robust evidence base for further policy and funding decisions in relation to tackling sexual violence and harassment in higher education institutions (HEIs). The development of the surveys was supported by the HEA's expert Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in HEIs (ESVH Advisory Group), which was established in January 2021.

A total of 11, 417 survey responses were received (7,901 students and 3,516 staff). The students and staff that responded reported alarming levels of sexual harassment and violence, indicating an urgent need for action to tackle the issues highlighted. The surveys also point to promising potential to build on awareness raising and education initiatives, positive intentions and attitudes among students towards active consent and proactive bystander intervention, and a high level of willingness of staff to engage in training and other initiatives.

The results of the student and staff surveys are presented in both summary and detailed reports that are available on the HEA website.

Drawing on an in-depth analysis of the survey findings, the reports set out a number of recommendations for action. This implementation plan represents a comprehensive and ambitious response to these recommendations through the inclusion of 19 actions to be delivered between 2022 and 2024. The plan was developed in close consultation with the ESVH Advisory Group, whose expertise and insights are greatly appreciated.

While the actions detailed in the plan are aligned to specific recommendations, there are synergies and complementarities throughout the plan, reflecting a holistic and multifaceted response.

The delivery of the actions in this plan are intended to build on and complement the broad range of initiatives ongoing across the sector towards the outcomes set out in the national policy framework published in 2019; '*Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions*,' (often referred to as the 'Framework for Consent'), and accompanying institutional action plans. The HEA is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the framework, and HEIs submit reports on progress to the HEA on an annual basis.

Monitoring and Oversight of the Implementation Plan

The ESVH Advisory Group will maintain oversight of progress towards the delivery of the actions outlined in this plan, in close collaboration with the HEA. The group will meet on a regular basis to monitor implementation, and a full review of progress will be carried out after one year.

Definitions

The National Surveys of Staff and Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs provided the following definitions –

Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence:

Sexual Misconduct is defined as any form of unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature that may be subject to disciplinary proceedings. This includes crimes of sexual violence, sexual cyberbullying of any kind including non-consensual taking and/or sharing of intimate images, creating, accessing, viewing, or distributing child pornography material online or offline, stalking behaviours whether online or offline in a sexual context, and any verbal or physical harassment in a sexual context.

Sexual misconduct can be committed by a person of any gender and it can occur between people of the same or different genders. It is often gender targeted and perpetrated to demean, diminish, and intimidate. Sexual misconduct may occur between strangers or acquaintances, including people involved in an intimate or sexual relationship.

For the purposes of the surveys, sexual violence and sexual harassment collectively referred to physical contact or non-physical conduct of a sexual nature in the absence of clear, knowing and voluntary consent. It also referred to conduct that derogates, demeans, or humiliates a person based on that person's sex or gender. Examples include sexual or gender-based harassment, stalking, and sexual violence.

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Topic	Recommendation	Related Framework Outcome(s)	Action		Stakeholder Responsible	Timeline
Building on the survey findings concerning sexual violence and harassment.	Continue to implement the 'Consent Framework' with adequate resourcing, while supporting HEIs with the adoption of an Action Plan approach to tackling sexual violence and harassment, while supporting shared learning across the sector and best practice approaches to trauma-informed policies and investigation procedures, alongside awareness raising, education, and training for all members of the HEI community.	Whole of Framework	1	**Identify and support development of a system of accountability.**	HEA	Q3 2022
			2	**Organise a conference to promote shared learning and showcase good practice in this area.**	HEA	Q4 2022
			3	**Review Framework Outcomes and identify key indicators that would comprise national reporting requirement.**	HEA / ESVH Advisory Group	Q2 2024
Integration with National Plans and Strategies	Accommodate staff needs and priorities within institutional Action Plans and the national strategies that underpin and guide these local plans.	Whole of Framework	4	**Formally include outcomes for staff in the Framework for Consent as part of Review.**	HEA / ESVH Advisory Group	Q2 2024
Ensuring inclusion and diversity are fully represented in research on consent, sexual violence and harassment.	Further work is required to explore the experiences of high-risk groups and smaller or hard to reach groups.	Whole of Framework	5	**Further analysis of staff and student surveys at the demographic level.**	ESVH Advisory Group / HEA	Q2 2023
			6	**Pilot initiatives targeted at supporting high-risk groups and smaller or hard to reach groups in a small number of HEIs.**	HEIs	Q1 2024

Topic	Recommendation	Related Framework Outcome(s)	Action		Stakeholder Responsible	Timeline
Diversity and inclusion	Conduct research to explore context and to be inclusive of all staff members	Whole of framework	7	**Conduct further research with groups such as staff members with a disability, international staff, and staff from non-traditional backgrounds.**	HEA (to commission) with input from ESVH Advisory Group	Q3 2024
Devising a long-term approach to research on student experiences.	A strategic approach should be developed to maximise the efficacy of accessing and recording different sources of information and data about student experiences.	6, 10	8	**Develop shared terminology and guidance in terms of what is reported and recorded at a local and national level.**	ESVH Advisory Group	Q3 2022
Monitoring and data collection	The national survey methodology should be reviewed in order to identify how ongoing monitoring and survey work can be carried out as effectively as possible.	Whole of framework	9	**Review survey methodology and frequency of surveys.**	ESVH Advisory Group	Q4 2023
System of support for staff members affected by SVH	Develop a system of support that ranges across topic areas such as a review of the reporting and investigation processes undertaken by HEIs, identifying pathways for informal support and formal reporting that includes local HEI units and line managers, and ensuring accessibility of personal counselling supports.	4, 5	10	**Map existing reporting mechanisms, investigation procedures and practice, and support services for staff and students.**	HEA, with input from ESVH Advisory Group	Q3 2023

Topic	Recommendation	Related Framework Outcome(s)	Action		Stakeholder Responsible	Timeline
Supporting people affected by sexual violence and harassment	Form a panel of trained and skilled external investigators to investigate cases of sexual violence and harassment. (*HEA Advisory Group Recommendation*)	5, 8	11	**Conduct a feasibility study in relation to the formation of a panel of trained and skilled external investigators to investigate cases of sexual violence and harassment against staff and students.**	HEI representative bodies with input from HEA Advisory Group	Q3 2023
System of support for staff members affected by SVH	Explore the context in which staff members have experienced sexual violence and harassment.	4, 5	12	**Undertake a study following the victim's journey from disclosure to outcome.**	HEA (to commission) with input from ESVH Advisory Group	Q4 2023
		9, 10	13	**Undertake a study which analyses the views and experience of those to whom disclosures were made.**	HEA (to commission) with input from ESVH Advisory Group	Q4 2024
Building on the survey findings concerning campus environment.	A targeted information and skills strategy is required to increase levels of knowledge and skills for accessing personal supports and reporting procedures.	11, 12, 13	14	**Mapping of existing training resources and practice in HEIs.**	HEA	Q4 2022
			15	**Conduct a scoping study to explore the feasibility of developing a national standardised set of trainings that are free and open access on all topics (disclosure, consent, bystander).**	HEA	Q3 2023

Topic	Recommendation	Related Framework Outcome(s)	Action		Stakeholder Responsible	Timeline
Building on the survey findings concerning consent, bystander intervention, and rape myth beliefs.	The HEI education plan should adopt the goal of enhancing skills and reducing perceived barriers to act on positive intentions.	11, 13	16	**Highlight and build on the positive survey findings to support development of training/educational programmes (pilot approach at local level).**	HEIs, HEI representative bodies and USI	Ongoing
			17	**Investigate potential for embedding in curriculum (e.g. in programmatic review) on a pilot basis.**	HEIs and student representatives	Q4 2023
Awareness, education, and training	The HEI education plan should adopt the goal of enhancing skills and reducing perceived barriers to act on positive intentions.	10, 13, 14	18	**Develop material that highlights findings in surveys with a view to informing action plans, etc. and educating staff further.**	HEA (national) HEIs (local)	Q4 2022 Q1 2024
Awareness, education, and training	Increase information, awareness, knowledge and capacity of staff members throughout HEI institutions in Ireland with regard to policies and procedures relevant to consent, sexual violence and harassment.	12	19	**Develop national and localised awareness campaigns (e.g. #unmuteconsent), incorporating a tiered approach.**	HEA / IUA / THEA / USI (national) HEIs (local)	Q4 2022 Ongoing

Appendix 1: Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions – Key Framework Outcomes (Section 4.2 of the framework)

Institutional Culture

1   A member of HEI senior management team will have responsibility for the implementation of the Framework.

2   HEIs will establish an Institutional Working Group to coordinate Framework implementation. This will be comprised of key stakeholders including academics, support services, administration, and students' unions, and will ensure due regard to balanced representation, in particular representation of groups at particular risk of experiencing sexual violence and harassment; women, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBT+.

3   Liaison and partnership with external specialist agencies to ensure effective engagement with external structures.

Institutional Processes for Recording

4   HEIs will create an easy to use system for students and staff to disclose and report incidents, which would be reflected in a high level of awareness and understanding among both students and staff.

5   The reporting system is compatible with complainant/survivor rights, cognisant of the needs of vulnerable groups, and has the confidence of the higher education community.

6   Institutions shall record statistics on harassment, assault, and rape and report them in the context of their strategic dialogue with the HEA.

Institutional Policies

7   Dedicated policies of breadth and depth consistent with the Framework aims.

8   Policies are explicitly linked to clear lines of responsibility, active responses, institutional reporting, and regular review.

9   Policies include guidelines for addressing student complaints, including transparency for all involved.

10   Policy implementation is supported by compiling relevant information, leadership of high level HEI officer, and through the appropriate structures, an annual report on institutional initiatives and data to the Governing Authority.

Targeted Initiatives

11   HEIs will provide direct student-facing activities including workshop/classes that promote an understanding of consent; student understanding and skills for speaking up and calling out unacceptable behaviour.

12   Ongoing messaging to disseminate information consistent with the Framework aims for cultural change and awareness.

13   HEIs will create and implement an education plan to ensure all staff and relevant students have at least a minimal agreed understanding and capacity to support students; create and implement a training plan for staff and students who contribute to initiatives and services.

14   HEIs will create and implement a system for measuring effectiveness of initiatives.

15   HEIs will provide accessible, trauma-informed services; for supporting student disclosure, reporting and complaints, and for counselling and advocacy.

Appendix 2: Membership of HEA Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in HEIs

Dr Amanda McCloat	*President St Angela's College, Sligo*
Dr Anna Bull	*Lecturer, University of York; International Advisor and co-director of The 1752 Group*
Dr Bernadette Quinn	*Senior Lecturer in the College of Arts & Tourism, Technological University Dublin*
Dr Cliona Saidlear	*Executive Director at Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)*
Enda Hughes	*Principal Officer, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit, Department of Further and Higher, Education, Research, Innovation and Science*
Jennifer McCarthy Flynn	*Head of Policy, National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)*
Prof Louise Crowley	*Bystander Intervention Programme, University College Cork (UCC)*
Noeline Blackwell	*CEO, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre*
Dr Pádraig MacNeela	*Active Consent Programme, University of Galway*
Dr Rochelle Fritch	*Scientific Programme Manager, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)*
Róisín O'Connell	*Head of Communications, Technological Higher education Association (THEA)*
Dr Ross Woods *(Chair)*	*Senior Manager, Centre of Excellence for Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Higher Education Authority (HEA)*
Sarah Behan *(since July 2022)*	*Vice-President for Welfare, Union of Students in Ireland (USI)* *(formerly Clare Austick to June 2021, and Somhairle Brennan from July 2021 to June 2022)*
Dr Sinéad Ring	*Assistant Professor in Law, Maynooth University*
Suzanne Walker *(since June 2022)* *(Secretariat)*	*Centre of Excellence for Equality Diversity and Inclusion, HEA* *(formerly Aedín Minogue, Centre of Excellence for Equality Diversity and Inclusion, HEA)*
Thomas Clonan *(to April 2022)*	*Lecturer, Media at TU Dublin / Author of "Women in Combat: The status and roles assigned female personnel in the Permanent Defence Forces"*
Tom Reilly	*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager, Atlantic Technological University (ATU), Sligo*
Tony McMahon	*Associate Director HR & EDI, Irish Universities Association (IUA)*
Treasa Fox *(since August 2022)*	*Head of Student Counselling, TUS Midlands / Chair of PCHEI (Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education Ireland)* *(formerly Gertie Raftery, Head of Student Counselling, DkIT and Chair of PCHEI)*