

National College of Ireland

Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions

June 2025

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(Across Ireland) Just over half of first year students reported experiencing sexual harassment / sexual hostility since beginning college. This rose to 62% for second year students, and 66% for undergraduate students in third year or higher.\(^1\)



¹ Sexual Experience Survey 2020, Union of Students of Ireland.

Introduction

The then Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor TD, launched the Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutions: Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive - Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in *Irish Higher Education Institutions* in April 2019.²

It is a requirement of the framework that all HEA-funded HEI's develop an action plan to tackle sexual violence and harassment. It is also simply good practice to do so, given how serious and widespread the issues of sexual harassment and violence are in society in general, and the HE-sector in particular.

In March 2022, NCI launched National College of Ireland Action Plan to Tackle Sexual Violence and Harassment; this document is a review of work to date and updated action plan, which adheres to the current Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutions: Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive - Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions.

The data

Ireland

- In a study released by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC), What Ireland thinks about sexual violence in 2025, it was found that more than a third of men in the student age group, 16-24 (36 per cent), said they believe a person who is raped or sexually assaulted while under the influence of drugs or alcohol is at least partially responsible. This figure drops to 10 per cent among men aged 45-54.3
- The same DRCC study found that almost three in ten adults report having been a victim of some form of sexual violence, with 5% reporting they have been raped.4
- In 2013, it was estimated that 16% of students experienced sexual assault while in-higher education in Ireland.5
- In 2020, 29% of women, 10% of men, and 28% of non-binary students reported non-consensual penetration by incapacitation, force, or threat of force during their time in college.6
- In 2020, sexist hostility was the most common form of harassment experienced by all student groups, ranging from 46% of Asian students to 70% of white Irish students.7
- It is important to note, sexual violence is a gendered crime. It is for the most part perpetrated by men against women. According to 2019 Rape Crisis

Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions
What Ireland thinks about sexual violence in 2025, DRCC (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre)
What Ireland thinks about sexual violence in 2025, DRCC (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre)

Say Something A Study of Students' Experiences of Harassment, Stalking, Violence & Sexual Assault, USI 2013

Sexual Experience Survey 2020, Union of Students of Ireland.

⁷ Sexual Experience Survey 2020, Union of Students of Ireland

- Network Ireland statistics, the vast majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are men (96%).8
- Most rape and sexual assault survivors are attacked by people they know, and this fact is the most likely reason most people do not report these offences to the Gardaí.⁹
- In 2022, the Central Statistics Office's Sexual Violence Survey, 10 found 52% of women and 28% of men reported experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime. 22% of people aged 18-25 reported experiencing sexual violence both as an adult and a child.

An international issue

- In a 2012 study across five European countries, 47% to 68% of women students reported feeling sexually harassed by verbal or threatening unwanted sexual advances during their HE studies.¹¹
- In 2021, a survey examining sexual violence by men who are students in the UK highlighted the prevalence of violence and misogyny at universities. According to University of Kent researchers, of the 554 men students surveyed, 63 (11%) reported that they had committed 251 sexual assaults, rapes and other coercive and unwanted incidents in the past two years.¹²

The context

It is critical to note that sexual violence and harassment (SVH) does not exist in a vacuum. It takes place within a wider context of patriarchal structures and the marginalisation and exclusion of women, the LGBTIO+ community, and minority groups.

SVH does not exist in isolation; it is inextricably linked to inequality in social, economic and political frameworks. Women and marginalised groups are traditionally underrepresented within decision-making and power structures. Their experiences and perspectives are excluded, and laws, policies, and priorities are defined by those in power. HEIs cannot adequately tackle SVH without transparently challenging the power dynamics within their own institutional cultures and ensuring that equality and representation are delivered at every level within their institutes.¹³

The eradication of violence against women and girls is also a target under one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of

⁸ Rape Crisis Network Ireland Rape Crisis Statistics 2019.

⁹ Mary Crilly, chief executive officer of the Sexual Violence Centre Cork, told The Irish Times that victims are often subjected to "mind games" by their attacker. Most rape victims don't report because they know the perpetrators (irishtimes.com)

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office (CSO) Sexual Violence Survey 2022

¹¹ "Gender-based violence, stalking and fear of crime: European Union" project (2012): data collected across 5 EU countries,
Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and UK (34 HEIs; 21,516 participants), reported in It Stops Now Toolkit, Ending Sexual Violence and
Harassment in Third-Level Education. Section One Understanding sexual violence and harassment, challenges and responses.

¹² Understanding Sexual Aggression in UK Male University Students: An Empirical Assessment of Prevalence and Psychological Risk
Factors https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/29/research-reveals-rapes-and-assaults-admitted-to-by-male-uk-students

¹³ It Stops Now Toolkit, Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Third-Level Education.

Section One Understanding sexual violence and harassment, challenges and responses.

violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.¹⁴

NCI Statement

National College of Ireland is committed to the promotion and management of an environment for work and study which upholds the dignity and respect due to each individual. The College supports every individual's right to work, study and visit in a climate which respects their individuality and diversity and, in an environment which is free from threat, harassment, intimidation, victimisation and bullying.

Sexual harassment, harassment or bullying in any form is totally unacceptable. The College will not tolerate any member of NCI, regardless of their position, being treated with anything less than professional courtesy and respect. Neither will NCI tolerate any member of the College, regardless of their position, treating a colleague, student or anyone coming into contact with the College, with anything less than professional courtesy and respect.¹⁵

Definitions: Sexual Harassment¹⁶

Sexual Harassment is defined in the Equal Status Act as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for the person. A single incident may constitute sexual harassment.

Many forms of behaviour can constitute sexual harassment. Examples include (this list is not exhaustive):

- **Physical conduct of a sexual nature** which may include unwanted physical contact such as unnecessary touching, patting, or pinching or brushing against another person's body, assault, and coercive sexual intercourse.
- Verbal conduct of a sexual nature including unwelcome sexual advances, propositions, requests or pressure for sexual activity, continued suggestions for social activity outside the workplace after it has been made clear that such suggestions are unwelcome, unwanted or offensive flirtations, suggestive remarks, innuendo, or lewd comments.
- Non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature which may include the display or sending of pornographic or sexually suggestive pictures, objects, written materials, emails, via social media, online messages, or text messages. It may also include leering, whistling, or making sexually suggestive gestures.

The Acts do not prohibit all relations of a sexual or social nature. To constitute sexual harassment or harassment, the behaviour complained of must firstly be unwelcome. It is up to each individual to decide:

¹⁴ UN THE 17 GOALS

Dignity at Work Policy & Student Policy on the Prevention of Bullying and Harassment
 Dignity at Work Policy & Student Policy on the Prevention of Bullying and Harassment

- (a) what behaviour is unwelcome, irrespective of the attitude of others to the matter; and
- (b) from whom, if anybody, such behaviour is welcome or unwelcome, irrespective of the attitudes of others to the matter.

The fact that an individual has previously agreed to the behaviour does not stop the individual from deciding that it has become unwelcome. It is the unwanted nature of the conduct that distinguishes sexual harassment and harassment from behaviour that is welcome and mutual.

In addition, to constitute sexual harassment or harassment under the Acts, the behaviour must have the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for that person.

The intention of the perpetrator of the harassment or sexual harassment is irrelevant. The fact that the perpetrator has no intention of sexually harassing or harassing the individual is no defence. The effect of the behaviour is what is relevant. Sexual harassment, harassment, or bullying is defined by the impact of the behaviour on the recipient and not necessarily by the intention of the perpetrator.

If an individual involved is below 18 years of age, or is a vulnerable adult, and conduct of a sexual nature occurs, the College's <u>Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults</u> should be referred to for further guidance.

Definitions: Gender-based Harassment

Gender-based harassment is aggression, intimidation, or hostile conduct based on sex-stereotyping, sexual orientation or gender identity, but not involving conduct of a sexual nature. For example, persistent disparagement of a person based on a perceived lack of stereotypical masculinity or femininity or exclusion from an activity based on sexual orientation or gender identity, for example deadnaming.¹⁷

Consent Working Group

The NCI Consent Working Group is made up of the following members. (Membership correct as of March 2025)

- Buckley, Jordan / Student Union Welfare Officer
- Crowe, Darren / Accountant Finance
- Cvetkovska, Meri/ Digital4Bussiness
- Jones, Karen / Registrar
- Kracen, Amanda / Associate Professor, Psychology
- Mahon, Shelia / International Officer
- McCarthy, Deirdre / Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager (Chair)
- McDonald, Laurence /HR Consultant
- Mooney, Karen / Head of Student Support & Welfare
- Murray, Teresa / Head of Communications

¹⁷ Use of former name of a transgender or non-binary person without their consent.

- O'Riordan, Brigina / Acting Assistant-Director Early Learning Initiative
 Stynes, Paul / Dean School of Computing

Action Plan to Tackle Sexual Violence and Harassment National College of Ireland

The department-prescribed consent framework covers four key areas,

- 1. *Institutional culture*: Effective structures in place, with institutions assigning responsibility by a management team member to implement the framework, including stakeholders, in the process
- 2. Institutional processes: Recording and reporting of statistics of incidents
- 3. Institutional policies: Dedicated policies consistent with the aims of the framework, with clear lines of responsibility, reporting, transparency
- 4. Targeted initiatives: For students and staff, including direct student-facing activities that promote an understanding of consent, an education plan to support students and staff, systems for measuring the effectiveness of initiatives and accessible traumainformed services

The NCI action plan has been developed using this framework.

In the below action plan, actions in green have been completed and or are ongoing.

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
	-	1. Institut	ional Culture	•	•	
Framework Outcome 1 A member of HEI senior management team will have responsibility for the implementation of the Framework.	1.1	Senior management team member appointed. Director of HR. EDI Manager will be the contact person.	VP of EDI Appointed Director of HR, with responsibility for EDI appointed responsibility for the framework.	Prof Jimmy Hill VP Mary Connelly Director of HR with responsibility EDI.	October 2021 January 2025	Member of senior management identified and in position.
Framework Outcome 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 student's unions, and will ensure due regard to balanced representation, in particular	1.2	Committee established in Sept 2021. Additional nominees for the committee sought and agreed October 2021. Working group developed NCI Action Plan. Framework launched March 8th 2022 International Women's Day. Working group renewed annually	Reconvened with additional members in October 2021. Additional membership secured.	EDI Manager with support of Working Group (WG)	Ongoing	Working Group established. TOR developed. Framework implemented. Plan developed and launched.
representation of groups at particular risk of experiencing sexual violence and harassment; women, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBT+.		Name changed 2023 to ESVH Working group Action Plan reviewed and redrafted February/March 2025, for approval April 2025	Reviewed action plan in place and on the website.			Revised plan launched and actions implemented.

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
Framework Outcome 3 Liaison and partnership with external specialist agencies to ensure effective engagement with external structures.	1.3	Liaise with appropriate external specialist agencies to ensure effective engagement with external structures to be identified and engaged with. Liaising with the Active*Consent, Bystander Training from UCC and Speak Out.	Training secured Training ongoing EDI Manager joined the HEA ESVH Practioners group	EDI Manager with support of Working Group (WG)	Ongoing Oct 2023	Appropriate supports provided as required.
	•	2. Institutional Pro	ocesses: Recording			
Framework Outcome 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.	2.1	 Currently Reporting via Staff - HR policy under the Dignity at Work Policy. Students - under the Bullying and Harassment Policy Review - Register Develop awareness campaign for students and staff on systems developed. Monitoring reports on annual basis, to be reported to Executive Group and Academic Council. Develop a specific SVH Policy and reporting structure for both staff and students. Review Dinity at Work and Student Bullying and Harassment Policy to clearly demarcate the function between them and the new SVH Policy. 	Two policies <i>Dignity at Work</i> reviewed <i>Bullying and Harassment</i> developed March 2022 Institutional monitoring reporting template developed Feb 2025	EDI Manager with support of Working Group (WG)	Review both policies Dec 2025 in the light of a new policy focusing on SVH. December 2025	Suitable system in place. High level of awareness amongst staff and students. Data collected, analysed and demonstrable used to inform impactful and timely decision making. SVH Specific policy in place

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
Framework Outcome 5 The reporting system is compatible with reporting party/survivor rights, cognisant of the needs of vulnerable groups, and has the confidence of the higher education community.	2.2	NCI Joined Speak out, usage remain low, need to promote and support use of Speak Out in NCI – link to the new Speak Out home in TCD and promotion of the mechanism nationally. Locate all reporting mechanisms in the one easy to find location on the website	All reporting mechanism in one easy to reach location on	EDI Manager with support of Working Group (WG)	Ongoing	Suitable system in place. High level of awareness amongst staff and students.
		Develop a specific SVH Policy with reporting structure for both staff and students, which is trauma informed and specific to SVH. (see 3.1) Develop dissemination strategies for ESV policy and reporting routes.	website		December 2025	mechanisms and routes in place. Increase rates of reports- currently reports are negligible.
		Develop promotion and marketing of all reporting pathways, monitor update from current very low levels.			Ongoing	
Institutions shall record statistics on harassment, assault, and rape and report them in the context of their strategic dialogue with the HEA.	2.3	Current reports are negligible, this is statically unlikely to be an accurate representation of the reality for staff and students. The development of a new SVH policy, aim to increase reporting and support reportees experience of the process.	Annual data is recorded with a template for this data developed.	EDI Manager	December 2025	Statistics reported annually. Actions taken as a consequence/ from the learning of the data/ issues raised.

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
		3. Institutional F	Processes: Policy			
Framework Outcome 7 Dedicated policies of breadth and depth consistent with the Framework aims referencing IUA/THEA guidelines and policies where appropriate.	3.1	Policies will be reviewed in the light of the issues that need to be included re consent. Addendums to be added as required. Key Policies • Dignity at Work, which covers staff • Bullying and Harassment Policy, which covers students	Policies reviewed 2022.	EDI Manager Registrar, Registrar Designate, HR Director and WG	Feb 2022	Policies meet the requirements re consent framework and are accessible and understood by staff and students.
		Develop a specific SVH Policy and reporting structure for both staff and students, which is trauma informed and specific to SVH. • Scoping policy requirements • Policy developed and approved Develop dissemination strategies for ESV policy and reporting routes.	New policy in place.		December 2025	
Framework Outcome 8 Policies are explicitly linked to clear lines of responsibility, active responses, institutional reporting, and regular review.	3.2	Current polices outline responsibility, active responses and institutional reporting Developing a specific SVH Policy and reporting structure for both staff and students, which explicitly link lines of responsibility, active responses, institutional reporting, and regular review	WG review these policies. New policy in place.	EDI Manager HR Director Registrars WG	Feb 2022 December 2025	Policies meet the requirements re consent are published and are regularly reviewed and monitored.

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
Policies include guidelines for addressing student complaints, including transparency for all involved.	3.3	Develop a simple guide for staff and students (to co-design with SU) to include: 1. Develop in line with new SVH policy 2. Reporting instances and how to report, and what happens when they are reported. 3. Supports available both in house and external. 4. What to do when an incident is reported to them. 5. Important/key contacts and supports.	Guide in place	EDI Manager HR Director Registrars WG Marketing	December 2025	Guide in place and freely available. To remain under regular review.
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.	3.4	Updates provided re ESVH framework progress to Academic Council and the NCI Governing Body.	Updates provided as appropriate to each meeting	VP EDI Manager WG	Ongoing	Academic Council and Governing Body papers inform decision making.

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator			
4. Targeted Initiatives									
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.	4.1	Consent training was provided by the SU and Feminist Society during the 2021/22 induction process. Consent training will be embedded in all student induction programmes. Review how training is provided and how it is delivered: • to ensure non first years are included • Ensure all are comfortable (reference to young students, and minority ethnic community students) NCI/ SU partnership agreement in place. Ensure that the role of consent training is explicitly referenced in SU handover of the function.	Consent Workshop run at Induction Sept 2021 for all first years. Staff trained in consent. Staff and SU trained in By-stander training. Partnership agreement in development.	EDI Manager with support of Working Group (WG)	Ongoing	All students and staff will have the opportunity to receive introduce consent training. Targeted staff and SU are trained in Bystander Training, and Disclosure training. Obligations confirmed within and monitored against the NCISU/NCI Partnership Agreement			
Ongoing messaging to disseminate information consistent with the Framework aims for cultural change and awareness.	4.2	Highlight senior leadership's support for work in this area as a priority.	Update messaging from President on webpage	President	June 2025	Support message in webpage.			

Relevant Consent		Action	Progress to date/	Person	Timeframe	Success
Framework outcome			milestones achieved	responsible	(start/end)	indicator
Ongoing messaging to disseminate information consistent with the Framework aims for cultural change and awareness.	4.3	 Create publicly accessible, specific, institutional, information on the NCI webpage. Inclusive of A message of support from the President Reporting mechanisms and designated contact people for staff and students Information on campaigns and initiatives Information on how staff and students can get involved in education programmes. Links for further information in relation to key internal and external services. A list of Working Group members NCI policies re SVH 	Webpage updated with all of the information	EDI Manager Marketing	April 2025 December 2025	A webpage with general information on the Framework for Consent at NCI has been created within the EDI section of the website. Further updates with SVH policy
Ongoing messaging to disseminate information consistent with the Framework aims for cultural change and awareness.	4.4	ELI held an event to engage with children and families in NCI's local community to foster awareness of consent and gender biases from an early age. Children came and explored our small world play, offering non-gendered costumes for dress-up & a story of 'The wonderful things you will be' by Emily Winfield Martin. 30 families attended with 55 children	Non-gendered dress-up costumes and toys are now included at ELI events during the summer progamme and wider parent and toddler groups. Nongendered toys and activities are a key focus of ELI's parent and child events to raise awareness of equal opportunities and aim to reduce gender biases.	ELI Team	July 2022	Event held
		New ELI event to take place			July 2025	

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
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.	4.5	Develop training plan and options, which will include mandatory inclusion in staff and student inductions, and scale training in line with roles and responsibilities for staff. Promotion of online consent training Active*Consent with staff and students. Awareness and training to take into account AF staff and students at all stages of learning (not just first years).	Training offered and attended throughout the academic year.	EDI Manager Deans SU HR Working Group	Sept 2025	Training opportunities in place.
HEIs will create and implement a system for measuring effectiveness of initiatives.	4.6	All initiatives will include a specific evaluation function. Annual Reports to Academic Council and Governing Body on the implementation of the Framework will include qualitative and quantitative information (where appropriate) on the implementation and impact of the framework.	SU evaluated the consent workshop provided and feedback was provided to the consent WG.	Working Group (WG)	December 2025 Annually thereafter.	Programmes and strategies improved as a result of evaluations.

Relevant Consent Framework outcome		Action	Progress to date/ milestones achieved	Person responsible	Timeframe (start/end)	Success indicator
HEIs will provide accessible, trauma-informed services; for supporting student disclosure, reporting and complaints, and for counselling and advocacy.	4.6	Ensure that NCI's wide range of support services are accessible and available to staff and students including:	In-house counselling services available to both staff and students.	HR Counselling EDI Manager Working Group		Services as required are available.