PROMOTING CONSENT AND PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

thea
TECHNOLOGICAL HIGHER
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

THEA PROPEL project overview
Presentation of final report

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#PROPEL

Project Network


- Project start: 5 October 2020
- Project end: 31 March 2021

- All THEA member institutions represented on **Steering/Working Groups** & included staff from:
  - ✓ EDI, Human Resources, legal representatives, Registrars, Student Counselling, Student Services (as well as USI & NWC)

- Project embedded within a wide **higher education network**:
  - ✓ Project funded by D/FHERIS
  - ✓ Attended institutional WG meetings
  - ✓ Liaised with the wider higher education sector

Project Network

- Liaising with **survivors' groups** & those who work with them
  - NWC
  - Rape Crisis Centres (DRCC, GRCC, RCNI)
  - 1752 Group
  - Garda representative

- Engagement with staff & students' **unions**, particularly during consultation on policy framework & procedures
  - USI
  - TUI
  - Fórsa
  - SIPTU
  - Unite

Report Contents

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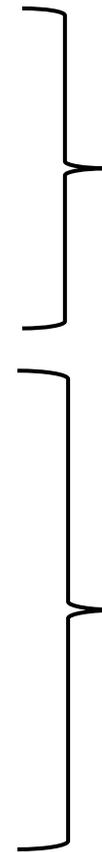
Guidance for Policies and Procedures

- **Practical & straightforward** to adopt by THEA member institutions – likely to be useful more widely also

- Guidance **informed by**
  - ✓ Extensive consultation
  - ✓ International guidelines and frameworks
  - ✓ Current & draft new policies in Irish institutions & existing policies in institutions overseas
  - ✓ IUA guidance & its members
  - ✓ Disciplinary Procedure for employees of the IoT sector

- Relevant to both **students and staff**, with differentiation being made between these where necessary

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is important to acknowledge that our understanding of the problems of sexual violence and harassment in higher education is still developing, and the best means of preventing and responding to these issues are consequently also in evolution.

Rather than the end, this report is just the beginning.

The report's 10 conclusions & recommendations relate to the following areas:

1. Structures and resourcing

2. Linkages and communication

3. Ongoing development and learning

Structures and Resourcing

Conclusion 1: Institutions are collaborators – not competitors.

By **working together** *and with the* **leadership of a centralised human resource**, *major tasks were broken down into steps and made achievable. This is a model to follow when introducing any significant new initiative in the sector.*

Recommendation 1: Grow collaborative links with the higher education sector, at home and abroad.

- Continuation of sectoral **Practitioners' Working Group**.

- Development of **peer-support network** across institutions.

- Build **national** and **international collaboration** through centralised resource.

Structures and Resourcing

Conclusion 2: Adequate resourcing is essential, both within institutions and supporting the sector.

Much work is already underway within institutions, but there is a limit to the progress that may be expected without being allocated additional funding for human resourcing.

Recommendation 2: Seek additional, recurring exchequer funding.

- Within institutions, appoint a full-time **Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Manager** to lead such work.

- Network of institutional Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Managers should be actively supported and assisted by a **full-time national/sectoral representative**.

- **All-sector panel of trained investigators** should be developed.

Structures and Resourcing

Conclusion 3: A common approach aids progress.

While allowing for institutional differences, it is important to ensure that a **common standard** *is met; this will also have* **practical benefits***, avoiding duplication of effort.*

Recommendation 3: Introduce standard approaches, insofar as possible.

- Standardisation of **templates and guidance** (Disclosure Form, Formal Report Form, and guidance for Investigation Reports).

- A sector-wide **identifier** or visual 'clue' to indicate that they are trained and willing to receive disclosures.

- Standardisation of the categories of misconduct **offences** and appropriate **sanctions**.

Structures and Resourcing

Conclusion 4: Effective training is needed for everyone – including staff.

*The **extension and embedding of training**, leaving no-one behind, must be prioritised. Students have benefitted from excellent training workshops and programmes in recent months and years; the same will need to be achieved for the benefit of all **staff**.*

Recommendation 4: Embed and develop training for staff & students.

- When students return fully to campus post-Covid, training will need to be in place sufficiently early in the academic year as to tackle the **red-zone phenomenon**.

- **Incentivise** take-up of training, particularly any groups where there is a lag in awareness or interest.

- General training, including Disclosure Training, will be key for roll-out among **staff**. A **tiered approach** may be taken.

Linkages and Communication

Conclusion 5: Buy-in throughout the institution's community is essential.

High-level support is already evident in the technological higher education sector […] Buy-in at the highest level of the institution must be transmitted widely to staff and students.

Recommendation 5: Communicate institutional buy-in visibly.

- Commitment in future institutional Strategic Plans as a key part of the overall EDI agenda.

- Develop an institutional webpage that lists important external and internal contacts and publishes the institution's policies and procedures.

- Recognition of additional work undertaken by staff in addressing sexual violence and harassment is advisable.

Linkages and Communication

Conclusion 6: Fearless external communication is key.

Given the complexity of messaging in relation to sexual violence and harassment and the understandable anxiety that this situation creates for institutions, **clear and consistent communication** *is needed. It must be conveyed that increasing numbers of formal reports and that staff and students' use of institutional policies and procedures may be interpreted as one of various signs of positive change.*

Recommendation 6: Take a national approach to communicating about sexual violence & harassment.

- Publish annual **data** at an aggregated, sectoral level.
- Publish an annual institutional **report** on bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct.
- Institutional webpages complemented by a **national** or **sectoral website**.

Linkages and Communication

Conclusion 7: Links with local experts are immensely valuable.

The technological higher education sector is well embedded in their regional contexts, and links with Rape Crisis Centres and related groups are often strong.

Recommendation 7: Formalise links with local experts.

- Formalise links between higher education institutions and **Rape Crisis Centres**.

- Strengthen links with the **Gardaí**: Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSU) located around the country and/or Campus Watch Gardaí.

Ongoing Development and Learning

Conclusion 8: Work is wide-ranging, multi-annual and will entail ongoing learning.

*The task ahead is considerable. This is the case, without exception, across the entire higher education sector. Such work requires **ongoing commitment** and will necessarily span multiple years; once-off initiatives will do little to achieve significant change.*

Recommendation 8: Monitor effectiveness and be prepared to adapt.

- **Data-gathering** is just beginning and monitoring such data will be essential.

- Occasionally, **failure** will be inevitable. When this happens, specific actions in institutional Action Plans must be reshaped and learnings shared.

- Once implemented, new **policies** and **reporting systems** must be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are working as intended.

Ongoing Development and Learning

Conclusion 9: Women have put sexual violence and harassment on the agenda.

*Expanding reach and welcoming **diverse champions** will be key elements of any future endeavours in this area.*

Recommendation 9: Seek diverse role-models and champions to further this work.

- Institutional Working Groups should seek to achieve **gender balance** and aim to be **inclusive**.

- **Participation levels** at training and events should be monitored actively for gender balance & tailored to **expand reach**.

- Sectorally, **diverse spokespeople** or **champions** against sexual violence and harassment should be developed.

Ongoing Development and Learning

Conclusion 10: Inequality is at the heart of sexual violence and harassment – gender is just the start.

Sexual violence and harassment are generally related to **power***. We must examine* **structural inequities** *that are the drivers of unacceptable behaviour and that set the conditions for abuse of power. This includes challenging and dismantling sexism, racism, ableism, and discrimination based on gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation.*

Recommendation 10: Build towards an intersectional approach.

- Institutional and sectoral data-gathering must be developed to include **intersectional data**.

- Some staff and students may have particular experiences and needs. Arising from evidence gathered, workshops and other interventions may need to be **tailored** to protect those who are particularly vulnerable.

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Thank you

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