

# The Effectiveness and Timeliness of Consent Classes in Higher Education

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## Opening Statement to the Committee on Education and Skills

### Dr Brian Gormley, Head of Campus Life on behalf of Dublin Institute of Technology

I thank the Committee for the invitation to attend today's session to contribute to the discussion on this important issue. DIT considers the area of sexual consent as an issue that is deeply connected to positive student engagement and to gender equality, and we welcome the focus on this area nationally.

In DIT, and more specifically in Campus Life, our aim is to deliver the best student experience to the 20,000 students in the Dublin Institute of Technology. We provide free healthcare; counselling; pastoral care services; career development; accommodation support; financial aid; learning support; and sports, societies, and volunteering activities to our students. We work in close partnership with our Students Union, and I would like to acknowledge the work carried out by the Students Union around the area of sexual consent. DIT prides itself on serving a diverse range of students – mature students, students with disabilities, international students, full-time, part-time and CPD, and ranging from apprenticeship, undergraduate degree programmes, to PhD Research.

In Campus Life, primarily through our Counselling and Health Services we see the impact sexual violence and unwanted sexual contact can have on students, and we are working hard to develop a proactive, effective approach to tackling the issue. The aim is to introduce a positive change of culture; to develop a more respectful community; to educate students and staff around consent; and to ensure that our policies and procedures can be used effectively to support and protect all our students.

This year, for the first time, a short video on consent was delivered at Orientation to all our incoming undergraduate students, over 4,000 of whom commenced in DIT this year. However, we recognise the need for a more in-depth approach. As with many of my peers across the Higher Education sector, I do not have any specific expertise or qualifications in the area of sexual consent or sexual violence or harassment. As such, we rely on the research and outputs of projects such as the NUI Galway Smart Consent project and the ESHTe project (Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level Education), of which DIT is an active participant. We expect that the outputs of the ESHTe project will be delivered over the next few months. In discussing the need for a more

comprehensive training, we are examining the effectiveness of voluntary versus mandatory training, and the impact each approach would have on resources.

In our submission we set out some recommendations which we hope will be a useful contribution to the discussion. The Institute would welcome a national framework and guidelines on how to positively promote consent, and in particular guidelines on how to effectively manage allegations of sexual assault between students who may be in the same programme / accommodation block.

I thank the committee for this opportunity to make an opening statement, and I look forward to discussing the matter further.