

# Opening Statement JCES-I-2021-[395]

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Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

From: Hugh Ahern

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Tráthnóna maith Cathaoirleach, Teachtaí agus Seanadóirí.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an gCathaoirleach agus leis an gCoiste as an onóir agus an deis iontach a bheith i láthair os comhair an choiste seo.

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English translation will not be readout

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Good Evening Mr Chairman, Deputies and Senators.

I would like to thank the Chair and the Committee for the great honour and opportunity to appear before this committee.

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My name is Hugh Ahern and I am a student of the Patrician Academy Mallow. I am currently in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. I have a keen interest in social and political issues.

The definition of bullying is the repeated use of threats or violence in an attempt to harm or intimidate others (Collins English Dictionary).

The definition for cyberbullying is “the use of the internet to frighten or upset someone, usually by sending them unpleasant messages”(Collins English Dictionary).

A nationwide survey of bullying in First and Second level schools conducted by Trinity College, Dublin, estimates that some 31% of primary and 16% of secondary students have been bullied at some time in their school years.

While Cyberbullying tends to not take place during the school day, it may be carried out by a student outside of school hours. It is a lot more difficult for a teacher, fellow student, parent or guardian to spot cyberbullying from normal bullying.

However, normal bullying has no record of the act, only human reflection. Cyberbullying has a digital footprint and can be traced back to the day it began.

Cyberbullying can often be more harmful and more threatening than other forms of bullying as it is always with you and there is no getting away from it.

### **What can the Education System do?**

#### **I recommend the following:**

1. Each school should be required to have a counselling service for students who need to talk to a professional rather than a teacher. This service could be in the school building or the school could refer them on to a counsellor.
2. I would recommend the committee to advise the Department of Education to look at updating the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary September 2013 as some of the policy may be outdated as it is eight years old and a lot of changes have happened since then in relation to cyberbullying.
3. I would recommend a full overhaul of the topic of bullying within the SPHE curriculum and make a more up-to-date curriculum.

4. I would recommend teachers to go on a training course about Bullying in the school environment, which confronts issues from the point of view of the bully, the victim and the bystanders.
5. I recommend that it should be mandated that there is a student representative present at key policy decisions pertaining to student issues, such as an Anti-Bullying policy on the school board of management as the students get very little or no say in these policy decisions and they are the ones with the experiences.
6. I finally believe that there should be a well-being day in each school across the country as many students can get overwhelmed by day to day social interactions.

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity and welcome any questions or concerns.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.