

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS AGUS SCILEANNA

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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*Dé Máirt, 23 Deireadh Fómhair 2018*

*Tuesday, 23 October 2018*

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The Joint Committee met at 3.30 p.m.

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#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Thomas Byrne,	Senator Robbie Gallagher,
Deputy Catherine Martin,	Senator Paul Gavan,
Deputy Jan O'Sullivan,	Senator Lynn Ruane.

In attendance: Deputy Paul Murphy.

DEPUTY FIONA O'LOUGHLIN IN THE CHAIR.

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Clerk to the Committee:** In the unavoidable absence of the Chair, I seek nominations for temporary Chairperson.

**Deputy Jan O’Sullivan:** I propose Deputy Thomas Byrne.

**Clerk to the Committee:** As there are no other nominations, I ask Deputy Thomas Byrne to take the Chair.

*Deputy Thomas Byrne took the Chair.*

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Deputy O’Loughlin will be here in a few moments. I remind members to turn off their mobile phones. We have received apologies from Deputy McLoughlin.

*The joint committee went into private session at 3.50 p.m. and resumed in public session at 4.40 p.m.*

### **Effectiveness and Timeliness of Consent Classes provided in Third-Level Institutions: Discussion**

*Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin took the Chair.*

**Chairman:** I remind members and witnesses to turn off their mobile telephones or switch them to flight mode as they interfere with the sound system and make it difficult for the parliamentary reporters to report proceedings. Television coverage and Internet streaming can also be adversely affected.

The next item on our agenda is our engagement with stakeholders on the effectiveness and timeliness of consent classes in third-level institutions. On behalf of the committee, I welcome Dr. Pádraig MacNeela from the school of psychology at National University of Ireland Galway, NUIG; Dr. Brian Gormley, head of campus life at Dublin Institute of Technology, DIT; Mr. Shane De Rís, president of Trinity College Dublin Students Union; Ms. Síona Cahill, president of the Union of Students in Ireland; Dr. Clíona Saidléar, executive director of Rape Crisis Network Ireland, and Mr. Phillip Crosby, principal officer at the Department of Education and Skills. The format of this part of the meeting will be that I will invite each of our guests to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of three minutes. This will be followed by engagement with members.

I draw the attention of our guests to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to so do, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should

not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I advise our guests that any opening statements they make will be published on the committee's website after the meeting. I thank them for their patience in waiting for us while we dealt with other business. This is a very important topic. All of the committee members felt we should examine it and hear from universities, students - who are incredibly important in all of this - and Rape Crisis Network Ireland.

**Dr. Pádraig MacNeela:** I have the privilege of representing NUIG today. I thank the committee members for their interest in the work we are doing at NUIG and at higher education institutions throughout the country to support a culture of active consent among the young adults who are students in our institutions.

I am representing the SMART consent research team, which comprises Dr. Siobhán O'Higgins, Dr. Charlotte McIvor, Kate Dawson, also at NUIG, and me. We work to put together a programme of research and practice in this area. We have developed a programme of consent education and awareness to support ourselves at NUIG and other institutions as well. We work from a definition of active consent. That is a really important definition to clarify. It is about ongoing and freely given verbal or non-verbal communication in respect of any form of sexual activity or intimacy. This also reflects the person's internal sense of willingness. It is quite complex once we delve into it.

We began in 2013, through a collaboration with Rape Crisis Network Ireland, to study people's understanding of sexual consent. In 2015, we developed that programme into the SMART consent workshop. This is a relatively short workshop. Thinking pragmatically, as we must do in implementation, it lasts between an hour to an hour and a half. We work with students with the help of trained facilitators with a manual and a full framework of support behind them.

Dr. O'Higgins and I have been very active in putting together a training programme. We have trained more than 200 students and staff members as facilitators of consent workshops since 2016. More than 4,000 students have now taken part in a SMART consent workshop in the nine or ten institutions where we have delivered workshops directly or trained people who deliver them within an integrated programme they develop at their institution.

I would like to direct the members' attention to four particular lessons we have learned through the collaboration we have pursued with so many people over the last several years. The first is to offer trainable, high-quality materials within the workshop format. Second, it is important for this to have a home within the institution, for example embedded within student orientation or the curriculum. There must be a place for it to be. Third, to embrace the goal of full awareness and culture change in this area, which includes awareness of sexual violence, consent programmes need to reach out the full community of students. It is not simply about workshops. We are particularly interested in developing a media campaign this year. There seems to be a sense that this is going to be rolled out quite widely and in the long term, we need to think seriously about going beyond the workshop format to embrace a theatre performance-based format. An example of this is the model that is available from several US campuses. A theatre troupe from the US has briefed us on their work in the last few weeks. Finally, this programme has to be made sustainable. It is great to do this work and we have learned a lot, but in the long term this has to be taken on board in institutions' policy frameworks.

It is really important to realise that the definition I have outlined is a positive, active defini-

tion of consent. It obviously encompasses all of the issues of non-consent, sexual violence, sexual assault and harassment. However, given where students are coming from and the often quite limited sex education they have received at school, we really have to meet them in a very positive way and work with them in the terms of their young adulthood. They may be experiencing this kind of sexual activity for the first time. Working through a consent workshop must not be perceived as a threatening encounter, but rather a liberating or fun experience students can have with their peers.

**Dr. Brian Gormley:** 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 to be deeply connected to positive student engagement and gender equality, and we welcome the focus on this matter 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 institute. We provide free healthcare, counselling, pastoral care services, career development, accommodation support, financial aid and learning support, as well as sports, societies and volunteering activities to our students. We work in close partnership with our students' union, and I wish to acknowledge the work carried out by the students' union around the area of sexual consent in DIT.

DIT prides itself on serving a diverse range of students, including mature students, students with disabilities and international students. We serve full-time and part-time students and those undertaking continuing professional development. Our students undertake courses ranging from apprenticeship and undergraduate degree programmes to PhD research.

In the campus life office, primarily through our counselling and health services, we see the impact sexual violence and unwanted sexual contact can have on students. We are working hard to develop a proactive effective approach to tackling the issue. Our aims are 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 our 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, 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 ending sexual harassment and violence in third level education, ESHTE, project of which DIT is an active participant. We expect the outputs of the ESHTE project will be delivered over the coming months.

We have discussed the need for 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 and I would be glad to discuss any of our recommendations or comments afterwards. We hope these recommendations will be a useful contribution to the discussion. In particular, 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 or accommodation block. I thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute and I look forward to discussing the matter further.

**Chairman:** Thank you very much, Dr. Gormley. Mr. Shane De Rís will speak next. He is representing TCD students' union.

**Mr. Shane De Rís:** The conversation around education on consent and relationships at third level did not begin this year. This conversation was initiated by students' unions and student support services many years ago. The vital and urgent need for more education on all issues relating to boundaries, consent and sexual relationships was identified in numerous surveys and reports. The 2013 Say Something survey by the Union of Students in Ireland found that 16% of respondents had experienced an unwanted sexual experience at their current institution. In 2015 my students' union in Trinity College conducted a survey which revealed that one in four women and one in 20 men at Trinity College had had a non-consensual sexual experience. The survey also highlighted issues around harassment and stalking. It was evident a shift in culture, attitude and behaviour was necessary. It was clear then that more needed to be done to tackle the crisis directly. The first step was to initiate the conversation around positive consent in relationships through the development of consent workshops. The need for education on such a topic was further highlighted in surveys carried out on those who attended the first pilot we ran in 2016. At that point, only 22.9% of attendees claimed to be well-informed about sexual consent. This rose sharply to 64.7% following the workshops.

In Trinity College, in conjunction with the student counselling service, the students' union first employed the SMART consent model from NUI Galway in rolling out the classes. This pilot was rolled out in first-year student accommodation on a voluntary basis during the orientation programme. The primary aim of these workshops was to get conversation and understanding going about what consent was and to have this as an ongoing topic during the year. It was, however, identified through participant feedback that there was a need to change the programme or model and develop one specifically for Trinity College. We changed the model by removing the PowerPoint presentation and the emphasis was moved from didactic presentations to interactive discussions. The workshop would aim to become more inclusive and less heteronormative, through the content and the case examples.

In 2017 and 2018, almost 100% of the target population attended the workshops and positive feedback was garnered from all the participants. Although the workshops were not mandatory they were promoted in such a way as to have them seen as a normal part of the orientation to college and the college residence welcome programme. The success of the workshops in Trinity College can, for the most part, be accredited to their inclusive nature from planning and administration to the content of the programme. The workshops were designed in partnership with students and staff, and are facilitated by both. This is vital in creating a cultural shift on the issue and encouraging participant engagement with the workshops. The effectiveness of the workshops is best evidenced by the feedback of those who partook. Fully 99% of participants referred to the relevance of the workshops to college life and 87% agreed that they learned something useful. The model employed in Trinity has proven its value and effectiveness. The necessity of the workshops cannot be understated.

The challenge now lies in broadening the accessibility of the workshops. We operate in an environment where support services are stretched to the limit and the resources necessary to make the workshops available are not available. The workshops must be supported by other initiatives within our institutions. In Trinity, we have embarked on developing first responder training to equip staff and student representatives, who may be presented to by a victim of sexual assault, with the necessary tools to assist. We are also developing bystander training for those who witness an inappropriate situation to train them in how best to respond and best

manage the situation.

The period of transition from second level to third level is a formative developmental period in any student's life. It gives us an opportunity to ingrain a positive attitude towards consent in all students and embed it as a natural part of college life. It is, however, a conversation that should be started at an earlier stage in the education of our young people. It should be built upon as young people progress through the system. If the committee, the Department of Education and Skills and the Minister genuinely want to see change and put an end to sexual violence at third level, then we need tangible support in the form of resources. The methods and models are ready to go. We simply need the means to do it.

**Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. De Rís. Ms Síona Cahill is president of the Union of Students in Ireland.

**Ms Síona Cahill:** Thank you, a Chathaoirligh, and I thank the committee for having us here today. I am before the committee on behalf of over 374,000 students throughout the island of Ireland. I am here because this is in fact a problem. I am here not because consent is simply the next new gritty issue for the student movement to talk about or because I or the student movement have all the answers, but because the issues arising now represents a problem that is growing. The student movement is not going to stand by, nor have we ever, and do nothing or be silent on the issue. It has to stop now but we need everyone on board to make that a reality, including Oireachtas Members.

The student experience is one highlighted to us by students and their students' unions across the country. The issue around sexual harassment at third level or within and for this age cohort did not start today or yesterday. Students' union welfare officers deal with the problem in their offices week after week. Sexual harassment has often become normalised in a space dominated by being social and sharing more of oneself across multiple online platforms. Photos are screenshotted and saved. They are used to threaten, vilify or hold over. Students and young people are being hurt by this behaviour emotionally and physically. They are subject to assault, and, more often than not, during all of this they tell no one. That is why in 2014, the Union of Students in Ireland led the way in creating and issuing the first survey of its kind in Ireland. One key finding was that 16% of students reported having experienced some form of unwanted sexual experience while in their current educational institution. Notably, only 3% recorded that they had reported these incidents to an official within their institution or to the Garda. Two frequent reasons for not reporting were put forward. First, the students did not believe the incident was serious enough to report. Second, they did not think that what happened to them was in fact a crime. We are not being dramatic when we say this is a serious issue. It is widely understood that students attending third level are in the process of handling a significant transition, one that affects all parts of their lives. It affects academic standards and can result in a distancing from familial supports and parental guidance. It often involves new living or rental conditions and experiences, as well as new social and peer group expectations in terms of socialising and relationships.

The Union of Students in Ireland has led the calls for improved relationships and sexuality education, RSE, before students reach third level. It is the daily experience of our elected officers that students are ill-equipped and do not have a satisfactory level of knowledge around sexual health, well-being and respectful relationships, including understanding the language around consent. Sexual health awareness has been a key point of USI's plan of work for more than two decades. We welcomed the report of the Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, which indicated that resources needed to be allocated to develop a



systematic approach to sexual and reproductive rights in Ireland. Looking at the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's, DRCC's, national helpline figures for 2016, the age groups, 18 to 24, and 24 to 29, make up almost 30% of its overall callers.

The USI has identified that there are gaps within the third level system in accessing safe ways to raise concerns and to get an effective remedy for issues arising. There is significant consensus among sectoral stakeholders that consent education is required at third level. There is also broad consensus that consent needs to be mainstreamed into the education of young people and students. We need more than a poster awareness campaign or social media content. Funding must be made available. A second Say Something data research project is required. Consent education must have a sex-positive approach and must also be inclusive of the LGBTI community. It must be student-centred and peer-led in conjunction with professionals. Our staff need to have first responder-style training in order that in the event of disclosures, post consent education, that there is somewhere for a person to go. Significant changes are required to the reporting structures at third level. We believe a designated staff member needs to be appointed in third level colleges. The statistics are clear and there are people behind them. We cannot pretend that it is not our responsibility and we must do something. We must act.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Cahill. I now invite Dr. Saidléar, executive director of the Rape Crisis Network Ireland, RCNI, to make her presentation.

**Dr. Clíona Saidléar:** I thank the committee for the invitation to speak to members today. This is a timely intervention. Sexual violence has been much discussed recently and the question now is what actions we can take to move beyond awareness into creating the change needed to build safety and freedom from sexual violence. The RCNI believes higher education institutes, HEIs, have a significant role to play in prevention. The third level sector is an engine for the production and reproduction of our culture and, as such, we would welcome these institutions fully, consciously and critically engaging in transformation towards prevention.

The task this committee has set itself benefits from the industry of a range of academics, welfare professionals and student leaders who have invested their expertise, resources and passion into devising and testing a range of curriculum interventions such as consent classes, bystander training, workshops, online resources and interactive and performance models of exploration on these issues. Some of these specialists are here before the committee today and can speak more expertly than can I on those aspects. With the right climate, these pockets of excellence can be nurtured and sustained into the future to continue the essential work of evolving and developing engagement with our ever-changing culture in order to create tools for safety from sexual violence.

The RCNI would like to make a key point to the committee about consent classes in third level. They are not stand-alone solutions to the challenge of addressing sexual violence and the work is not complete if or once the best practice and proven classes are embedded across HEIs. Indeed, we would consider it a failure if we limited ourselves to consent classes. Consent classes need to form one part of a whole-of-system approach in order to have a sustainable and positive impact. A whole-of-system approach would involve a critical engagement of the institution, and accountability and proactiveness in creating safety. This might include, for example, consent and bystander programmes integrated into induction programmes for all new entrants, as has been achieved in the IT in Tralee; consistent, visible year-round zero tolerance promotion across campus, on and offline; a protocol on responding to all sexual crime incidents; a policy on supporting an individual who has reported an incident, including establishing a tailored support plan for the duration of the person's education; a policy on responding to in-

dividuals against whom allegations have been made; HR and CPD strategies, which are gender-proofed, to ensure a professional and consistent support infrastructure is provided by the HEI in line with the above policies and protocols, which is visible to students, accessible and valued as a professional part of a staff member's role; staffing awareness, CPD and gender-proofing and equality measures to reflect an institution-wide engagement with embedded inequalities that facilitate rape culture.

Other jurisdictions have examined this matter in detail, which means much of the research and evidence is now available to us. For the RCNI, a key barrier to sustainable success in preventing sexual violence is that expertise keeps falling away due to a lack of infrastructure and investment in specialisation. I draw the attention of the committee to the fact that no institute, dedicated funding stream or academic topic specialises in sexual violence. We contend that identifying and valuing multidisciplinary engagement and sustaining academic specialisation in sexual violence is a critical part of the effectiveness of any third level approach to the prevention of sexual violence. This committee, in reflecting on these issues, might ask what the Government can do to foster the sustainability of this expertise.

We recommend that first we would have consent and other workshops on preventing sexual violence and that they should be evidence informed, evolving and embedded. There is no shortcut to a whole-of-institute response and consent classes should be parallel to ensuring the appropriate structural responses to sexual violence and primary prevention across the whole institution are in place. The standing this focus and subject has in our HEIs, the space provided for reflection and intervention and the value placed on this work is critical. Engaging new entrants to all HEIs in their culture to create a safe place to learn and freedom from the fear of sexual harassment and violence is a key part of that transformation; supporting institution-wide engagement is the rest of the work.

**Chairman:** I thank Dr. Saidléar. I now call on Mr. Crosby who is representing the Department of Education and Skills.

**Mr. Philip Crosby:** I thank the committee for the invitation to today's meeting to discuss consent in the third level institutions. As committee members are aware, all publicly funded third level institutions provide a range of student support services, including counselling and health services to their students. In conjunction with these services, the third level institutions support the student unions in their campaigns and initiatives on sexual health for students. In recent years a number of third level institutions have established sexual consent programmes and workshops for their students. These programmes and workshops have a significant positive impact on students. An example of the programmes include NUI Galway's SMART consent workshops, which were developed from a recognition of positive health promotion, as well as an awareness of sexual violence. NUI Galway has assisted in the rolling out of the workshops in a number of other higher education institutions. University College Cork's bystander intervention is a six-workshop module on bystander intervention for first year students in its law, nursing and applied psychology classes.

The student unions are an integral element to the provision of such information to the student population in the higher education institutions. Every year the USI holds its sexual health and guidance week in the higher education institutions throughout the country. The issue of consent has been a significant feature of its recent campaigns. I also acknowledge the significant work being done by the National Women's Council of Ireland under its ending sexual harassment and violence in third level education, ESHTe, project. The project aims to tackle sexual violence and harassment in third level institutions. The NWCI's It Stops Now website



is an invaluable resource in this area.

The Minister of State, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, has stated that providing excellence in education depends on providing a safe learning environment, free from sexual harassment, assault and the fear or threat of it. In August 2018 the Minister of State launched the latest report of NUI Galway's SMART consent team, on sexual consent among third level students. On 4 October 2018, the Minister of State brought together representatives from the higher education institutions, student unions and other stakeholders for a meeting on consent and tackling sexual violence in third level education. The Minister of State is currently examining the issues that were discussed at the meeting, and will shortly be establishing a working group to devise a toolkit of appropriate initiatives and interventions that will be made available to the higher education institutions to deploy within their institutions. I hope I have been of assistance to the work of the committee. I am happy to answer questions and provide the committee with any additional information it may require.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Crosby. I now invite members to ask questions.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** I thank everybody for their simple, concise and effective presentations. I noted that neither the USI nor Dr. Saidléar of the RCNI mentioned the SMART programme in Galway. I understand it was originally funded by Rape Crisis Network Ireland.

**Dr. Clíona Saidléar:** No, there was a piece of research-----

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Initially.

**Dr. Clíona Saidléar:** -----on consent, alcohol and sexual violence-----

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Okay.

**Dr. Clíona Saidléar:** -----which then led to-----

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** I ask other the witnesses to comment on the Galway initiative. Is it the gold standard in this country for consent at third level? What are the ongoing funding requirements of that initiative? What can it do with the funding it has? Can any of its research be applied to second level? I understand the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is doing some work in that regard. Ms Cahill should explain what she meant by differing cultural norms from international students. I thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

**Chairman:** I will take questions from all the members before reverting to the witnesses.

**Deputy Jan O'Sullivan:** Dr. Gormley raised the issue of whether it should be voluntary or mandatory to contribute to consent classes. This question has been touched on by others. I understand that Trinity College has timetabled workshops for students in halls of residence and that Institute of Technology, Tralee has something for all new entrants. As we have heard from Rape Crisis Network Ireland, the work we need to do in this area should not be confined to consent classes but should apply across an entire institution. To what extent do we reach everybody we need to reach?

That is my main question, but I have some subsidiary questions that Ms Cahill might be best placed to answer. Are the people who are most likely to go to these workshops those who are concerned that something will happen that they have not consented to? What about the people who are likely to assume consent when it is not being given? How do we reach the people who may be the main cause of the problem, if I can put it that way? It is in that context that I am

asking whether these classes should be voluntary or mandatory. To what extent are the people on both sides of the consent question being reached?

I was interested in what Dr. Saidléar said about the approach being taken at Institute of Technology, Tralee. I wonder whether the joint committee should get some specific information on that.

Ms Cahill mentioned the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. I was a member of the committee, which made an important ancillary recommendation on the question of having appropriate and comprehensive relationship and sexuality education at all levels. Perhaps Mr. Crosby can tell us to what extent the Department of Education and Skills has a role in ensuring such education is offered. This aspect of the matter is probably broader than what we are considering today.

Mr. De Rís mentioned that some people who start college have not previously been given much information on the specific area of consent. I ask Mr. Crosby to comment on the role of the Department of Education and Skills in moving beyond identifying good practices in certain places by ensuring those practices are spread across the education system in an age-appropriate manner. They are needed at higher education level and maybe also at the pre-higher education levels.

**Deputy Catherine Martin:** I thank all the witnesses for their presentations. In addition to asking my own questions, I would like to ask some questions on behalf of Senator Ruane, who has had to go to the Seanad Chamber. When she was here a minute ago, she asked me to put certain questions to the witnesses. I will begin with my own questions.

Is Ms Cahill of the view - I suspect she is - that all third level institutions should have a dedicated liaison office with trained personnel to oversee the reporting and handling of sexual harassment and assault allegations? It seems that the current reporting structures in a number of institutions can be quite unclear. I presume that lack of clarity acts as a disincentive to students when they are deciding whether to report incidents.

Is there any process for collecting data on incidents of sexual assault on campus at a national level? Could the collection of data inform a standardised approach to consent classes across Ireland? Should there be a standardised approach to the provision of consent classes across all institutes? Would that help to develop best practice, allow shared learnings and avoid duplication of effort?

Like others, I would like to know whether the witnesses believe we should be starting earlier. If so, should we start at post-primary level or at primary level? Does the potential exist for the higher education institutions to work with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to develop consent-based programmes that complement one another for the various stages of the school curriculum?

I join Deputy Jan O'Sullivan in asking the witnesses whether they believe consent classes should be compulsory. What is the best way to ensure the people who need these classes receive them?

I will conclude by asking three questions on behalf of Senator Ruane. The first two questions are for everybody. First, how well do the dignity and respect policies under which most universities operate work? What would an adequate framework for responding to reports of rape and unwanted sexual contact look like? When we introduce consent classes, there is an

increase in reporting. Second, how are consent classes currently funded? What is needed to sustain consent classes and help them to grow? Senator Ruane's final question is for Mr. De Rís. Can he give the joint committee an idea of what is involved in consent classes?

**Senator Robbie Gallagher:** I thank all the participants for their contributions. Some of the questions I had intended to ask have been touched on by my colleagues. Are we coming at this too late from the witnesses' perspective? Should we be introducing this at a more appropriate stage before students reach third level? That is primarily a question for Mr. Crosby, although other speakers have touched on this aspect of the matter.

Having listened to the witnesses' contributions, it appears to me that a great deal of good work is being done in this area by different people. Everybody seems to be doing his or her own thing. Is there any joined-up thinking between everyone? Are ideas being shared from the Department down? Are ideas being shared across the universities? I would be interested to hear the witnesses' comments on that.

Has there been a decrease in the number of sexual assaults reported to the universities since the introduction of consent classes? What are the data in that regard?

The issue of funding has been mentioned by many speakers. Do the witnesses agree that if we are serious about this, we need to provide the necessary funds to ensure the recommendations that are made are actually carried through?

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** I would like to ask a couple of questions along similar lines. Dr. MacNeela mentioned that the limited education which exists in schools can be seen in the work that is being done in Galway. I ask him to explain how that can be seen and what its impact is. Obviously, it links in with the point that has been made about taking an holistic approach. Third level institutions do not exist as islands. Students have lives before, during, after and outside their lives in third level institutions.

I read the report setting out the results from Galway. On the one hand, they illustrate the prevalence in our society of problems like sexual harassment and bad attitudes to consent. On the other hand, it is striking to see that the consent workshops are having an impact across all the different metrics. The report shows there is a significant improvement in awareness levels after the workshops by comparison with the levels prior to the workshops. I definitely take the point about a need for an holistic approach. This is one of many aspects of that. Obviously, there is now a very strong evidence base for consent workshops.

I am not sure whether anyone has mentioned what percentage of students receive consent workshops at the moment. Does anyone have that figure? I presume the percentage we are dealing with at present is quite small. If we have an evidence base for saying this is an important element of education on sexual health and consent etc., how can we make it more accessible? This is the key point of all the contributions. Has anyone put a figure on how much it would cost to provide the necessary resources to roll this out on the kind of basis that would be needed to make it accessible? I accept that the question of whether this should be compulsory is an important one, but at the very least it should be accessible for every single third level student as a starting point.

**Chairman:** I would like to add a few questions to those that have been asked. Essentially, the joint committee is examining the effectiveness, timeliness and delivery of various types of programmes. The colleges and universities that are rolling out programmes certainly have to

be commended. The programmes that involve students and their peers being given training to help others are definitely to be commended. Different approaches are taken. Part of what we want to do is to look at standardisation and who delivers the programmes. We all accept and acknowledge the need for these programmes. It is heartening that the number of students taking the courses has jumped by 600% in the past 12 months. Young people are recognising the need for this and are willing to participate. That is heartening. This goes back to Deputy Jan O'Sullivan's question regarding whether it should be mandatory or voluntary. There is also a question as to whether Government funding for universities and institutes of technology should be dependent on the delivery of these classes. This needs to be taken seriously.

It is important that young people better understand the meaning of consent. There is a need to support them and improve their communication skills when they are at a vulnerable stage of their lives in to minimise the risk of inappropriate sexual behaviour. The key point is whether this needs to start at secondary level. I direct that particularly to Mr. Crosby to answer. Does the Department feel there should be standardisation and that it should be mandatory and introduced at second level, while preparing young people to take the leap into the world of third-level and further education? Perhaps there are plans to introduce consent classes at post-primary level about which Mr. Crosby can tell us. What funding is needed?

I thank Rape Crisis Network Ireland for the practical and useful suggestions it has made. I will now go back to the witnesses and stakeholders.

**Mr. Shane De Rís:** It might be good to start with the content of the workshops that we employ in Trinity. They are modelled from NUIG's SMART consent. We remodelled it so it was less about teaching people what consent is and how to act and more about stimulating their own thought and understanding and conversations around consent.

The workshop takes a simple format and lasts about an hour or an hour and a half. It begins with a general warm-up session and ice breaker. We then use the FRIES model, which was originally employed by Planned Parenthood in the US. FRIES stands for freely given, retractable, informed, enthusiastic and specific. We then move on to case-by-case studies and examples. They are open-ended so it could be a relationship or something that is happening after a night out. We ask the students how this situation should proceed. That gets them thinking about what they would do in that situation. It is simple and does not take a lot to roll out but it is a matter of making them more accessible. We roll them out in the first year residence in Trinity Hall. It is a targeted population of first years and there was 100% attendance on their part. It is now a normal part of orientation.

To make it available to the whole college would require resources. We have trained student facilitators who, in partnership with someone from the student counselling service, facilitate the workshops. The counsellors and the training of the students are the resources required to carry out the workshops. There is now incredible demand from societies, sports clubs and college sports departments to roll the classes out to their members and the people who use their facilities and services. There are ways of rolling this out beyond the first year hall of residence. It is a matter of getting the resources to ensure we can do that.

The content is simple but it does work. The figures and feedback say that people feel more informed after they have sat through, and engaged with, the workshop. It is about creating a positive atmosphere around consent, rather than telling students what constitutes consent. It gets students thinking about what is consent. We are pleased with how it has gone. We need to make them more accessible.

**Chairman:** I should point out that recent research led by DCU shows a 50-50 split of males and females in the courses. That is also really important to note.

**Dr. Brian Gormley:** I will address a couple of questions, if that is okay.

**Chairman:** Yes, absolutely.

**Dr. Brian Gormley:** The concept of what is mandatory is challenging from the perspective of a manager in a university when considering things such as orientation. Mandatory means that a student will not graduate unless he or she completes this programme. I do not think that is what we are seeking. We can put it into orientation, which we say is required, but if a student misses orientation, as happens, he or she can still progress. If it becomes a cultural norm within the institution, then it can reach more than 90% or 95% of students. The most effective way to ensure that we get the vast majority of the students is to incorporate it into an orientation programme. If we try and insert it in the academic programme, there are significant challenges because our first year engineering students, and our apprenticeship students, are timetabled for 35 hours a week. If we get it into the orientation, we can reach the vast majority of students. There is real value in the voluntary programmes like the SMART consent programmes. There is an element of preaching to the converted, because people who go to a voluntary programme are people who are supportive of these ideas, but they are also generally the student leaders, the opinion formers on campus and the people who can call out behaviour that they see and highlight inappropriate behaviour and bring it to our attention. “Mandatory” is an unusual word in higher education. Much as one would think we can set it down, sometimes we cannot.

I thank the committee for its support of Technological University Dublin. We are working with our colleagues in Blanchardstown and Tallaght and everyone is supportive of incorporating consent classes into orientation next year.

Senator Gallagher asked if there will be a drop in reported sexual assaults. I think there will be an increase in reported sexual assaults due to the increased awareness and willingness of students to call out unacceptable behaviour. Students are more likely to recognise that something that happened to them should not have happened. They will be more willing to report it. According to our counselling service, over a five-year period, there were five or six reported rapes or attempted rapes each year, some on campus and some off campus. We are not aware that any of those have been reported. They were dealt with by the counselling service and it supported the students but they did not progress to the gardaí or the university authorities. The feedback from the students was that alcohol was involved and they were not aware if consent was given. I could go on about alcohol. The students in question were also conscious that if they reported it, they were not comfortable that they would be treated fairly and the process of reporting it may be more challenging for them and would make the situation worse. That is an area we must work seriously on.

Deputy Catherine Martin asked about the standardised approach to dealing with complaints. That would be valuable. Speaking on behalf of all my colleagues in student affairs across the higher education sector, because we are all struggling with this and trying to deal with it, it would be quite challenging for some of the smaller institutions to get legal advice on a framework that would assist in dealing with these complaints. The sector has previously dealt with alcohol sponsorship on campus, etc., through a sectoral approach, and this framework has been very helpful. Even though it may not be stipulated that one must go down that route, the fact that it is recommended as good practice means that, very quickly, one must implement such practice and it then becomes the norm. Such a framework would be very helpful to us.



As to whether consent should be taught earlier or at secondary level, it absolutely should be incorporated in that regard. However, this would not remove the onus from third-level institutions to continue with consent classes because we must set the culture, ethos and values in higher education.

I have probably spoken enough so I will give colleagues a chance.

**Mr. Philip Crosby:** I will try to address a number of the questions in general rather than going Deputy by Deputy or question by question.

Again, if it did not come across in my opening statement, I would not want to understate at all how seriously the Department and the Minister take the issue of consent. We attach significant importance to it. That said, and while issues of sexual consent and the culture behind it are very long-standing ones for us all in society, the reality is that it has come to the fore as an issue in higher education in relatively recent years. For this reason, and like others, I think the system is probably in a way catching up and trying to develop initiatives and so on to respond to this. While it is of considerable strategic importance to the Department and the Minister, I would not want to suggest the Department is claiming any particular expertise or monopoly of wisdom on the matter. For this reason, the Department is not carrying a flag for any gold standard or particular standardised approach.

In considering whether there is a gold standard, one thing that occurs is that if I look at the contrast of perspectives and approaches, it seems that SMART consent very much relates to the issue of consent as it affects people in situations at given times. The UCC bystander programme, on the other hand, has more to do with the culture that surrounds what happens when we are a third party and we see something happen. It aims to create a culture that is less tolerant and less supportive of misconduct and the attitudes - particularly the sexist attitudes - that go with it. In other words, both approaches have a role to play. The ESHTe project and It Stops Now seem to combine them. I would not like to see any of these being seen as a particular gold standard for which to aim. For this reason, and coming out of the workshop that was held in October, what the group that has been brought together plans to do next is to try to develop a toolkit or suite of appropriate interventions that can be operated or implemented in institutions and then to have some means of ensuring that the institutions are accountable for doing so and rolling this out. That is where I am coming from.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** I accept what Mr. Crosby says - it is very reasonable - but what if resources were limited and we wanted to ensure that this was done? If NUIG is rolling out the programme nationwide, do we decide that the funding should go to NUIG, which can then take the lead on the programme, or do we decide that every college can do this? We do not really have an NCCA, a centralised curriculum body, at third level. Each university devises its own programmes of education. I am only asking the question. If NUIG saves a few quid and does the job properly, is it the one that should be picked to receive the limited State funding available? Should we decide to support NUIG because its programme works, or has been seen to work, and it would then be mandated to support the rest of the institutions?

**Mr. Philip Crosby:** It is unfortunate that, owing to circumstances, I did not get to attend the workshop. One piece of good fortune the Department had was to have many of the leading experts in the field, including one or two people sitting at this table, involved. They will go on to be members of the group to try to devise that toolkit of initiatives. Again, while the group will produce a suite of measures, I would not want the Department, the officials or the Minister to claim any kind of monopoly of wisdom on this or to pre-empt the work the group will do.

The group's work is about to get under way and it intends to produce its output in a very short period.

**Chairman:** Members would really appreciate it if that could be sent to the committee in order that we might circulate it. That would be important. If any of the stakeholders or witnesses wish to add anything else following this meeting, I ask them to do so before we compile our report. I will go back to Mr. Crosby to conclude. I am sorry I interrupted.

**Mr. Philip Crosby:** A number of the issues raised touch on the role and remit of the Department. I am conscious of two things in this regard. One is the issue of a standardised approach. While I appreciate that a standardised approach can avoid duplication of resources, the question of a standardised approach across higher education institutions should be linked with the question of mandatory versus voluntary courses that was discussed earlier. From the point of view of good practice - and this came out in Mr. De Rís's comments about tailoring something for the particular circumstances of a college - while there may be a suite of initiatives, tackling the attitudes that go with misconduct and that are so negative involves communities. The community on a campus is where one gets this right and gets best practice. From this point of view, the Department does not believe there is a one-size-fits-all scenario. When it comes to the question of course content or student content delivered by the HEIs, there is an issue of academic freedom, and the Department would not be in a space of directing or dictating whatever the institutions themselves might do. The idea here is really to make best practice models available to the institutions and then ensure that they deploy them as best they can.

If I may come to the question as to whether it is too late, there is an issue as to whether this work would begin when someone is at the age of 18 or 19 or earlier. I do not want to comment in any personal capacity in this regard except to say that the former Minister, Deputy Bruton, very recently called on the NCCA to initiate a review of the RSE programme in schools. This review covers a multiplicity of different relationship and sexuality education issues, but consent, what it means and its significance is the first item on the list as an issue to be dealt with. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is our expert in this field. As I said, as the NCCA goes into this review I am not sure with whom it will consult but I have no doubt but that the HEIs will have a role in that, if for no other reason than they have a role in teacher education and so on. However, this would really be a matter for the NCCA, which is due to report back to the Department and the Minister on this review in the first half of 2019.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** On that point-----

**Chairman:** This is the Deputy's last supplementary question.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** There are only two of us left, so I will not delay proceedings. Have any of the five witnesses or their organisations, apart from Mr. Crosby, been contacted by the NCCA on this review of RSE? I do not need to know the-----

**Dr. Cliona Saidléar:** Yes.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Has Dr. MacNeela?

**Dr. Pádraig MacNeela:** We initiated some contact with the NCCA.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Was that a two-way process?

**Dr. Pádraig MacNeela:** Yes, but very brief. We just let people know. Would this be an op-

portunity to give some of the responses I have?

**Chairman:** I was going to let Dr. Saidléar in because, to my mind, she had indicated next, and then Ms Cahill.

**Dr. Cliona Saidléar:** To answer the question as to whether it is too late, like everyone else here, I think the earlier we start the better. It is also never too late, however. I have specialised in sexual violence for a very long time. I am still learning. Third level is an appropriate point at which to start intervening and doing this work.

On the issue of reach and the mandatory aspect, I agree with Dr. Gormley. There was a query about IT Tralee. It is a question of embedding and normalising this content in, for example, induction and orientation processes. I apologise for flying through the issues raised, but this goes somewhat to the question of cost. If there is an existing orientation and induction infrastructure, the content could become a normal and embedded part of that and, consequently, would not require a new infrastructure.

Another aspect of the question on who gets to have this conversation on campus is covered under the national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. A gold standard of content is being developed across the various subject matters at third level. In this context, I am referring to training in areas where people would in their professional capacity need to have interactions about and some knowledge of sexual violence. For example, a gold standard would be developed in respect of what every nurse should know about sexual violence when graduating. That development is happening in parallel with this work, with the latter being about all students, with some specialisation and targeting of information around domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

A part of the slightly tricky question of who volunteers is addressed by embedding and normalising it and changing the culture. It is a matter of trying to surround those who are not engaging to the point that they are inevitably engaged because the context around them has changed. It is a multilayered response, not one where people simply turn up to a workshop in order to tick a box. There must be visibility of the multiple layers of response throughout so that the wagons surround those who are reluctant participants in change, as it were.

As Dr. Gormley alluded to, the standardisation of some aspects would be helpful. Most higher education institutions would welcome some standardisation of, for example, response protocols. It is often a crime that is being responded to, which requires a multi-agency set of protocols to be devised in order to help guide every higher education institution. There are other types of standard response that we would like to be accessible to students. Ms Cahill has spoken about some of those matters. Response protocols would be an important element of standardisation.

Regarding the content of the curriculum, I would be cautious about locking it down as we do at primary and second level. As we move up in cultural sophistication, the question of locking down a curriculum becomes counterproductive. We need an evolving curriculum because our culture is evolving. In our experience regarding developing and delivering these types of programme, they go out of date very quickly. However, criteria would be locked down and standardised. For example, one would want to standardise what a learning programme is and whether a measurable capacity to evolve is built into it.

Several members asked for data and inquired about how we are counting, tracking and mon-

itoring things. This is an important aspect of standardisation. We count badly at the moment. There are little data and visibility and a great deal of unevenness. Institutions count differently even within their different locations. ITs are doing the counting and taking responsibility for it. It is a hotchpotch, so we cannot answer the question of where we stand as regards data. It would be good if we standardised how, what and when we counted and who was counting it so that we could begin to understand what we were looking at and to measure impact. Doing it together would make it more possible and productive. A question was asked about collaboration. There is a great deal of collaboration. The universities and ITs have organisations that work on building shared and standard responses for them. As programmes and initiatives have grown, most of us at this table have engaged in organic collaborations. There are a number of structures. There has to be a collaborative, inter-agency and multilevel response from administrations, academics, students, NGOs, the Department and the HEA. It is through this type of approach that we will get there.

**Chairman:** I thank Dr. Saidléar. Next is Ms Cahill.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** We will be under pressure to leave for the Dáil in the next ten minutes.

**Chairman:** Deputy Jan O’Sullivan has agreed to step in while we-----

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** None of us might be left by then.

**Chairman:** I know.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** We might be as well to conclude now.

**Deputy Jan O’Sullivan:** I will be chairing a meeting with no members.

**Ms Síona Cahill:** I will endeavour to be brief as I go through the queries. The SMART consent piece is covered in our written submission. I just did not refer to it in the three minutes I had. We are supportive of and have worked with NUIG on the SMART consent model, its feedback and how to progress it since its inception. A message I want to hammer home is that initiatives have been successful on institutes’ campuses where they have collaborated with student leaders and student unions, which is something that the SMART consent model has done.

Regarding culture and norms, it is a fact that there are different conceptions and understandings in different countries and cultures regarding consent and the related language.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** And around the roles of men and women.

**Ms Síona Cahill:** That is also an issue.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** It is, but it is not one we accept. If there is a-----

**Ms Síona Cahill:** We need to address the gender norms and stereotypes entering our institutions based on international students.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Okay.

**Ms Síona Cahill:** If we are running a consent workshop or education course, it needs to be inclusive. It cannot only be something that identifies with people aged between 18 and 24 years. There are mature students, international students and LGBTI students who need an inclusive and sex positive space.

Reaching people cannot just be the box-ticking, class-type model. We are not advocating for that. Rather, we are saying that a workshop model needs to be introduced across institutions in the wider context of consent education. As Dr. MacNeela mentioned, it can be done through theatre, videos, social media campaigns and workshops throughout the year. However, a box-ticking class is not the way forward. We tend to see people who are interested in being student leaders or who are already interested in this area, for example, those doing good work in feminist and other societies on campus, being the first to attend these. It must be asked whether they are the right people. The more we mainstream this, the better, as we will not just be equipping people who are already interested to be bystanders. In TCD, for example, accommodation was a target, with as many people as possible receiving consent classes.

Deputy Catherine Martin asked about the data collection process. There is zero to little collection, which is part of the problem. A member asked whether there will be a drop in the number of people noting violence or disclosing issues. The numbers of those making disclosures will increase. I have seen in my own experience but also in students' unions across the country that where one runs sexual health and awareness campaigns and introduces the concept of consent people at that point see the students' union as a place to disclose, which is a concern.

Deputy Catherine Martin also asked a question about staff members. We support the idea of a person being designated in each institution to ensure consent education programmes are rolled out.

Senator Ruane asked about reporting. We have a serious concern about the protocols in third level education institutions. The question has already arisen in the DIT's submission about where people approach and speak to somebody in a counselling centre, are dealt with in a health centre but then they do not progress to the reporting stage. We are seriously concerned that the reporting structures in colleges are not clear enough. We are concerned that in the majority of institutions issues of consent, sexual harassment and assault are couched in terms in dignity and respect policies that are not very accessible to students.

A question was asked about whether educating at third level was too late or whether people should be educated about these matters beforehand. I want to make it absolutely clear that it is USI's policy that such education should happen way before entry to third level. The fact is one has a higher population of sexually active young people aged between 17 and 24 years, at which point intervention is needed. The first time people hear about consent or condoms should not be during sexual health awareness and guidance, SHAG, week run by USI in the first year of college. It is not good enough that there is no comprehensive relationship and sexuality education, RSE. I take Deputy Thomas Byrne's point that our interaction with the process is important.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Has there been good interaction?

**Ms Sóna Cahill:** No. Relationship and sexuality education is far from what it should be.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** I accept and know that, but what about the engagement between USI and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment? The NCCA works at second level, while the USI is a third level body, but the two organisations know a lot about this matter.

**Ms Sóna Cahill:** We have made contact with the NCCA and asked if can we make a submission on this matter. It is important that we do so because we see the effects.

**Deputy Thomas Byrne:** Yes. The USI and NCCA are the experts that I hope are consulted.



**Ms Síona Cahill:** I will answer the last question asked by the Chairman about where and how we make this happen. We need to have a conversation about such education being tied to the compacts. I do not have a position on it, but I do think we need to have that conversation quickly. We need more data because people are asking questions about what happens in institutions. That is why we would like to rerun the Say Something survey we carried out in 2014. We need to move away from consent classes being the point at which we talk about consent, education and respect across all levels of education and society.

I thank committee members for their time.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Cahill. Last but not least I call Dr. MacNeela. I have listened to the call that consent education should be mandatory. It strikes me that if such education was mandatory in college and not everybody attended the class, potentially, a situation could arise. The Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, recently launched NUIG's SMART Consent workshops. At the launch she said attendance at sexual consent courses should be mandatory for students in all third level colleges and I share her view. What about the delegates? Obviously, they will respond to some of the other questions asked.

**Dr. Pádraig MacNeela:** It is really important that strong language be used to have a strong impact and statement of purpose when one comes from a position where historically there has been little or no activity. That is why I think deliberately using a word such as "mandatory" is a strong way to put it out to colleges that they should work out what it means for them.

Let me outline what we have seen in our travels throughout the education system. We now work with up to ten institutions from Belfast to Cork and from Galway to Dublin. We have seen a range of settings into which this work will slot immediately. Sometimes it is students' union driven, sometimes it is student service driven and sometimes there is a balance. It is a unique configuration and we have learned from these lessons.

Institute of Technology Tralee has been mentioned. Ms Jackie Rutledge works in its health promotion department. She has been inspirational and helped to show us how one can integrate students safely within the programme of education one is trying to convey.

I want to mention a couple of points by way of clarification. We offer a workshop. We use the word "workshop" deliberately because it implies that one is active and involved in a range of different activities. One is out of one's chair performing individual tasks. One works with a small group of people with whom one exchange views. One also engages in whole group tasks.

Where we bring introduce information from outside, we draw on data we have gleaned from over 3,000 students who responded to our surveys and scenarios we presented to them via online formats. It does not matter what the view within the room is because we offer ambiguous scenarios and ask whether a smile is enough and the people concerned had too much to drink. We can also give people information from their peers outside the room, which is really important. For example, we present a same-sex scenario where the question is if the people concerned should have talked more because there was a misunderstanding and some non-consenting behaviour. What we can show is that 90% of one's peers outside the room who have completed our online survey say it is okay to ask and that one can clarify. Then we work with the people in the room and ask them what they would say. We get their words, to which we can come back repeatedly during the course of a workshop. All of it is really important in terms of inclusivity. Another scenario we present is where a man has been subject to harassment by a

woman. It is another really important model that has to be spoken about.

We discuss relationship issues, including, for example, the issue of consent in long-standing relationships versus prototype hook-up scenarios. All of these things are extremely important in terms of the content of a workshop, what makes it interactive and why we get a high score of four out of five from students, including those in Trinity College Dublin in 2016. It is encouraging that that result was not obtained by specialised persons who delivered workshops. Instead, we have trained people who go on to get really positive results from the students with whom they work. It is important to note that our workshops are effective.

I would like to interest members in a much bigger vision. We can get bogged down in discussing issues surrounding programmes being mandatory and so forth, but we want to see the big picture. Ideally, as several people said, it would not simply be a workshop, an island of civility, with someone then walking out and encountering whatever else is going on. We need to be targeting people via new methods such as what we are doing with short consent videos. In that case, one gets to choose the decision points and decide whether the people will back out of the scenario or go ahead and so forth. Also, there is the theatre performance. It was one of the only ways we could reach the thousands of students who had been mentioned in the vital couple weeks of orientation. We have seen a consent programme deployed in different settings. The University of Limerick and the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, GMIT, have scheduled it in classes. The National College of Art and Design has scheduled it in class hours. In Galway as that opportunity is not available to us, we worked it into a student accommodation model similar to what is done at Trinity College Dublin. As I said, we have to consider the bigger picture. It should not just be an one-hour experience but a repeated message based on good, solid research evidence that is updated regularly and seen throughout the year.

At second level we now have, possibly, the only opportunity we will ever have to have the different levels of education speaking to each other. People are asking what should be done in colleges and schools. It is the perfect opportunity to have common language and a stepped or graded approach to how we will talk about consent at second and third level. Of course, it will be based on a common message and common features of interaction and dialogue but which will be tailored to the needs of the individual user that one has at school where one is curious about the biological aspects of sexual health and in colleges where people are much more interested in issues of equality and diversity. In turn, we can tap into ongoing issues that we totally need to discuss. I refer to the debates about alcohol, relationships, communication and mental health. It is what makes consent such an interesting issue that sheds light on a number of aspects of the development of young adults.

We need to approach the matter in a very positive way. In a school environment where 75% of students say they have not received satisfactory sex education, the idea of a consent workshop is threatening on several levels when one enters third level education. Women who experience sexual harassment may see a consent workshop as a threatening experience, while men walking into a consent workshop with no background knowledge of what it involves may also see it as threatening and wonder whether they will be put on the spot or asked questions. We need to embrace it as a positive experience and unique opportunity. The committee has a unique chance to speak across the different levels of education and we are very interested in helping it to do so.

**Chairman:** I thank all of the delegates for their insights into their experiences in the roll-out in their particular areas. It has been a fascinating discussion and it is clear that we have much to do in this area. If any of the delegates wish to provide further information or have further

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thoughts they wish to share with us, we will make sure to incorporate them into the final report which will contain the committee's recommendations to the Minister. We appreciate their time and insights.

The joint committee adjourned at 6 p.m. until 3.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 6 November 2018.