**Higher Education students and management roll out the
#UnmuteConsent Campaign
to drive a positive conversation about consent, and to end sexual violence and harassment on campuses.**

**02.10.2023:** Sexual Violence and Harassment (SVH) is a problem on higher education campuses and is under-reported. The #UnmuteConsent campaign seeks to mobilise the student community to make a difference, by speaking out, by enhancing their own knowledge about consent, and ultimately, by challenging and changing behaviours. Through this digital campaign, we also want to increase levels of knowledge and skills among students for accessing personal supports, and reporting procedures that engage all students in a non-threatening and empowering way.

#UnmuteConsent will roll out across all Higher Education campuses from October 2nd and the website [www.unmuteconsent.ie](http://www.unmuteconsent.ie) will highlight the support, resources and training available in each higher education institution in the country.

As the new academic year has commenced on campuses around Ireland consent is forming part of the student induction process in addition to the tools and supports this campaign seeks to highlight.

By engaging with the support and training available in every institution, the campaign seeks to encourage students in:

1. Speaking out/reporting unacceptable behaviour and accessing support.
2. Being active and challenging perceived norms of unacceptable behaviour
3. Talking about consent and relationships in a positive and confident way
4. Practicing consent in their relationships and interactions

Welcoming the campaign, **Minister for Further and Higher Education Simon Harris TD** said:

*“Sexual harassment or sexual violence doesn’t start or end in third level education, but education is the greatest tool to dismantling this culture that has crept into our society. We all have a role to play to ensure that we create a culture of zero tolerance, which will contribute to a change in attitudes and increased awareness.*

*There is a particular responsibility on those charged with educating the next generation in ensuring that students and learners are equipped to lead the change across society.*

*The #unmuteconsent campaign 2023 recognises the power of the student voice to drive change.*

*Be the generation that stands up and speaks out, to create a respectful environment for everyone — on and off our campuses.”*

All higher education institutions are currently implementing a wide range of measures within the National Consent Framework (*Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions)*.

These measures include:

* Appointment of dedicated Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Managers across HEI campuses.
* Implementation of comprehensive policies to address SVH.
* Enhancement of support services available to those who have experienced SVH.
* Implementation of an anonymous report and support facility in all HEIs.
* Extensive roll out of Consent education and Bystander Intervention training programmes.
* Communication and awareness raising initiatives to promote institutional commitment to ending SVH.

To supplement these initiatives and to further encourage conversation about consent, the Higher Education Institutions, their Representative Bodies IUA and THEA, the Higher Education Authority, and USI are launching the #unmuteconsent campaign 2023.

The campaign was informed by findings from the National Survey of Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs (2021), and the Active\* Consent Sexual Experiences Survey (2020), trend data emerging in 2021/22 from anonymous reporting tools, and the experience of HEIs in researching and implementing action plans to educate and raise awareness about consent, and to combat sexual violence and harassment.

Speaking on the launch of #unmuteconsent campaign **Dr. Marie Connolly, Chair of the IUA Vice Presidents of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group**, said: “*Following the remarkable reach of the #Unmuteconsent campaign in 2022 we are delighted that IUA is in a position to lead this campaign again this year. Sexual Violence and Harassment is a problem on third level campuses and across all strands of society in Ireland. Our ambition is for a safe and respectful third level experience for staff and students and we know that a culture of speaking about consent can help transform how we as a society respond to unacceptable behaviour. We are determined to continue our efforts to end SVH on campus and have designed this campaign to promote an understanding of consent; student understanding and skills for speaking up and calling out unacceptable behaviour”.*

**The HEA’s head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Sheena Duffy** said, “*We are delighted to support the third iteration of the #unmuteconsent campaign, which is an important element of the work ongoing across the higher education sector to address sexual violence and harassment. The campaign will make a significant contribution towards a campus culture in which every member of the HEI community feels safe, respected and supported, and in which sexual violence and harassment will not be tolerated. It also plays a vital role in signposting the crucial support services available to those who may need them*”.

More information on the campaign and resources available can be found at <http://www.unmuteconsent.ie>

**Ends**

**For media queries and interview opportunities contact:**

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**Notes for editors:**

Links to the supports available in each of the participating HEIs can be found on [**www.unmuteconsent.ie**](http://www.unmuteconsent.ie)

**Sexual Consent** is described as the freely given verbal or non-verbal communication of a feeling of willingness to engage in sexual activity. This description entails an ongoing, mutual and preferably verbal communication, and is consistent with the definition of consent in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, as where the individual “freely and voluntarily agrees to engage in that act”.

Statistics from the [National Survey of Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEI in 2021](https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2021/04/Summary-report-Students-Jan-2022.pdf) on underlying attitudes, knowledge, perceptions of safety regarding sexual consent and sexual violence are set out below. 7,900 students completed a survey as part of the research to provide a large national sample across gender, sexual orientation, and year in college.

* A majority of students agreed that they discussed sexual consent issues with their partner (61%) while 20% disagreed that they had done this.
* Half of the respondents (53%) agreed that they had heard other students discuss consent issues on campus while 30% disagreed with this statement.
* About one fifth of students felt shy or lacked confidence in engaging in active, verbal consent.
* A majority of students agreed that they felt safe from SVH at their accommodation and around the campus, but at the same time approximately four in ten of the students agreed that sexual violence and harassment were a problem at their higher education institution
* 72% of female students had experienced offensive sexist remarks, and 62% of students experienced unwanted attempts to establish a sexual relationship

**This campaign is supported by:** The Higher Education Authority, The Irish Universities Association, the Technological Higher Education Association and the Union of Students in Ireland.

**Background:**

In April 2019, the Framework for Consent in HEIs; *'Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions'* was published by the then Department of Education and Skills. The Framework aims to ensure the creation of an institutional campus culture which is safe, respectful and supportive.

In April 2021, at the request of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, TD, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) conducted national surveys to monitor the experiences of students and staff in relation to sexual violence and harassment, in order to create a robust evidence base for further policy and funding decisions in relation to tackling sexual violence and harassment in higher education institutions (HEIs).

The HEA established an expert [Advisory Group on Ending Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment in HEIs](https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2021/04/HEA-Advisory-Group-on-Ending-Sexual-Violence-and-Harassment-in-Irish-HEIs.pdf) in January 2021 to support this work. In collaboration with this advisory group, the HEA Centre of Excellence for Equality Diversity and Inclusion developed and ran national surveys of staff and students to monitor their experiences in April 2021. The findings of the surveys were published in January 2022 and can be found [here](https://hea.ie/policy/gender/national-survey-of-the-experiences-of-students-in-relation-to-sexual-violence-and-harassment/).