

Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions

Call to support HEI collaboration to develop guidelines or standards for investigations of breaches of institutional SVH policy

Introduction:

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is seeking to support higher education institution collaboration on the sectoral development of guidelines or standards for investigation of breaches of institutional sexual violence and harassment (SVH) policy.

The HEA is particularly interested to support a collaborative approach that is informed by the latest promising practice and research, including the findings of the [HEA National Surveys](#) of Staff and Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs (2022), in addition to lessons emerging from similar initiatives globally.

The [Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions Implementation Plan](#), was launched in October 2022 in response to analysis of the National Surveys of Staff and Student Experiences of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish HEIs. The Implementation Plan is intended to build on and complement the broad range of initiatives ongoing across the sector towards the outcomes set out in the national policy framework ([Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions](#)) and accompanying institutional action plans. This call is intended to support HEIs to build capacity in line with Outcome 15.

Action 11 of the ESVH Implementation Plan, to conduct a feasibility study in relation to the formation of a panel of trained and skilled external investigators to investigate cases of sexual violence and harassment against staff and students, was completed in 2023. The feasibility study was developed by a sectoral working group and was followed up by an implementation working group. This group outlined a set of core investigator competencies and trauma-informed principles for organisations (outlined in Appendix 3). This call seeks to build these identified competencies and principles into the guidelines/standards developed.

Action 10 of the ESVH Implementation Plan, to map existing reporting mechanisms, investigation procedures and practice, and support services for staff and students, was

completed in 2025. The findings of this action indicated that there is variation across HEIs in relation to institutional investigation processes. Common challenges noted by HEIs included the need to improve internal policies and procedures, a need for clarity and support around investigations and a need for increased sectoral guidance and collaboration.

Timeframe:

- Call for applications issues to HEIs – 29 September 2025
- Deadline for applications – 12:00pm, 10 November 2025
- Announcement of outcome – Q4 2025

Scope

The purpose of this call is to facilitate collaboration between HEIs to develop sectoral guidelines or standards for investigations of breaches of institutional SVH policy. While HEIs and their Governing Bodies are responsible for the implementation of institutional policy, common guidelines or standards would assist HEIs to develop capacity for institutional investigation when required.

Consultation with relevant HEI and external stakeholders on the development of the guidelines is strongly encouraged to ensure relevance, effectiveness and uptake by participating HEIs and the wider sector. This consultation may include EDI offices, Human Resources/Employee Relations, institutional ESVH implementation groups, trade unions, HEI legal departments, health and safety, law enforcement, Cuan or other relevant bodies.

Project Deliverables

Applicants should provide a clear list of all project deliverables/outputs to be completed during the project. As a minimum, the following deliverables are required:

- Clear stakeholder consultation plan to ensure relevance, effectiveness and uptake of the guidelines/standards developed.
- Set of guidelines/standards developed by the participating HEIs and shared with the wider sector.

Budget

The total funding envelope is **€100,000**. It is intended to allocate the total budget to one collaborative proposal. It is intended that the budget would contribute towards the costs of any independent legal support that may be required of the

guidelines/standards developed. The HEA reserves the right to allocate more than one award and to allocate more or less than the total envelope as is deemed appropriate. Applications may include a maximum funding request of **€100,000** from the HEA. Eligible costs can be found in Appendix 1.

Funding for the successful applicant will be provided in 2 stages: 80% of the budget will be provided at the outset of projects, with the remaining 20% provided upon receipt of a satisfactory interim activity and expenditure report.

Projects must be completed within 18 months of HEIs receiving initial funding. Award holders may request extensions to this timeframe in exceptional circumstances. Requests for changes or extensions must be submitted to the HEA in advance, and these will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Collaboration

The recent establishment of SVH Prevention and Response Manager posts in HEIs and the formation of the ESVH Practitioner Network by the HEA present an excellent opportunity to design effective guidelines and standards that are trauma-informed, that uphold the rights of all parties involved in the process and that are responsive to the needs of the sector.

Applicants are encouraged to include as many HEI partners as is practicable, with **three at a minimum**, ensuring a range of institution types, sizes and locations. It is anticipated that internal HEI resources will be leveraged to ensure effective guidelines/standards are created. Partnerships with external stakeholders are also encouraged.

- It is intended that resulting guidelines/standards can be adapted by HEIs in line with their institutional policies and processes.
- It is intended that HEI collaboration during the development of the guidelines/standards will provide a basis for further collaboration and learning that can be applied at HEI level.
- It is intended that the resulting guidelines/standards will be adopted by the participating HEIs and be available to other HEIs to adopt.
- Project leads should consider the potential for pilot implementation of the guidelines/standards in at least one institution during the funded period.
- Project leads should consider including a member of senior management as a project champion.
- Project leads should ensure that the project team includes relevant HEI expertise including ESVH practitioner and trauma informed expertise.

Participating in a sectoral collaboration does not negate the need for HEIs to carry out (and invest in) continuous ongoing capacity building specifically in relation to its own specific policies, procedures, and practices. Participating institutions should consider how the guidelines developed are complemented with training, skills building, and supports currently available at both national and/or HEI level.

HEI Eligibility

1. Eligible higher education institutions under this initiative are those listed in Appendix 2.
2. Proposals must be collaborative and involve **at least three eligible higher education institutions**. Wider participation of HEIs is encouraged, but applications must demonstrate the commitment and contribution of all institutions participating in the project. Collaboration with students or student representative bodies is permitted.
3. All proposals must nominate a lead institution for administrative and financial purposes.
4. As per Appendix 2, eligible institutions can act as lead or partner in proposals. Relevant non-HEI organisations may be included in proposals as partners in addition to the three eligible HEIs.
5. HEIs from outside of Ireland may be included in proposals as advisory partners in addition to the three eligible HEIs.
6. Applications are welcomed from all staff members (academic, research, professional, management and support staff) of the relevant higher education institution. Staff intending to submit applications should contact the office of the Vice-President/Director of EDI in their institution. All applications must be signed by the Vice-President/Director of EDI in each participant institution. Undergraduate or postgraduate students may participate in projects under the supervision of the project lead.

Application procedure

Applications should be submitted using the application template by email to EDI@hea.ie by **12:00pm, 10 November 2025**.

In submitting an application, all partner HEIs will be deemed to have accepted the conditions outlined in this and any subsequent clarifications from the HEA regarding this initiative and to have agreed to be bound by them. Furthermore, signing of the application by the Vice President/Director of EDI (or heads of institution) reflects acceptance of the award and a commitment to provide the necessary support for the programme of activity. All applications must be signed by the Vice-Presidents/Directors of EDI of the collaborating institutions or their authorised nominee.

Assessment Process

The HEA will establish an Assessment Panel to evaluate the applications received. The Assessment Panel will comprise members with relevant expertise. In establishing the Assessment Panel, due regard shall be given to gender balance.

The Assessment Panel will consider the extent to which the applications meet the criteria of the Call as outlined in this document.

All applications will be assessed solely on the basis of the material provided to the HEA at the time of submission.

The HEA's decision on the award of funding under this call is final.

Assessment Criteria

In accordance with the objective of this Call and the requirements described above, the following criteria will be used to assess proposals. A minimum threshold will apply in respect of each of the assessment criteria. Only proposals which score 500 marks (50%) or above will be considered for funding. Meeting the minimum threshold is not a guarantee of funding.

Assessment Criterion	Details of Assessment Criterion	Maximum Score	Minium Qualifying Threshold
1. Alignment with rationale for the call	Noting the Report in relation to Action 10 of the ESVH Implementation Plan; <i>'Map existing reporting mechanisms, investigation procedures and practice, and support services for staff and students'</i>, HEIs would benefit from development of a set of sectoral guidelines or standards for investigations of breaches of institutional SVH policy. A strong rationale for the proposed approach, supported by the latest data and evidence, including reference to survey data, HEI and	200 marks	100 marks

	national data collection, reporting data, research etc where relevant. Alignment with core competencies and trauma-informed organisation principles set out in Appendix 3. Alignment with relevant findings of the HEA National Surveys on ESVH, the relevant actions under the ESVH Implementation Plan and HEI commitments under the ESVH Framework. Learning from practice and research has been considered and integrated into the design of the guidelines/standards.		
2. Project Design and Description, and Project Team	Clear description and timeline of activities, deliverables, outputs. Deliverables/outputs list, including (but not limited to) the required deliverables: • Clear stakeholder consultation plan to ensure relevance, effectiveness and uptake of the guidelines/standards developed. • Set of guidelines/standards developed by the participating HEIs and shared with the wider sector.	250 marks	125 marks

	Project team comprises sufficient range of expertise to ensure robust best practice guidance. Clear description of how the project will be managed and the role of each institution in the project. Carefully considered methodologies, supported by evidence. Risks are carefully considered and appropriate mitigation strategies put in place. Overall quality of the project design.		
3. Outcomes, Monitoring and Evaluation	Articulation of anticipated SMART outcomes (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound). Incorporation of measures to track and measure outcomes and capture learning.	150 marks	75 marks
4. Benefit to HEI Stakeholders nationally	Strategic partnerships and collaboration. Collaboration/co-creation of standards/guidelines with relevant HEI stakeholders. Potential for replicability, uptake and implementation by HEIs and wider sectoral impact. Innovative or pilot approaches and potential for sectoral learning.	300 marks	150 marks
5. Value for money and	Value for money and impact.	100 marks	50 marks

impact of programme	Costs are appropriately justified and aligned with the expected outcomes of the project. A feasible and achievable initiative within the proposed budget and timeframe.		
Total		1000 marks	500 marks

Reporting and monitoring

It is expected that a robust monitoring system will be developed and resourced, and that the project outcomes and expenditure will be appropriately tracked.

Projects must be completed within 18 months of HEIs receiving initial funding. Award holders may request no-cost extensions to this timeframe in exceptional circumstances. Requests for changes or no-cost extensions must be submitted to the HEA in advance, and these will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Institutions with successful proposals will be required to submit an interim report to the HEA on progress, expenditure and the outcomes and a final report at the end of the project in line with the reporting schedule provided by the HEA. Funding balances will not be allocated unless a satisfactory interim report is submitted within the agreed timelines and accepted by the HEA.

Should an institution be successful for funding under this Call, institutions will be required, as per S38(2) of the HEAA 2022:

- a) to provide financial and other information to the HEA CEO;
- b) to use the funding in a cost effective and beneficial manner;
- c) to operate according to standards of good governance;
- d) to comply with the guidelines, codes and policies issued by the HEA under S143 of the HEAA 2022;
- e) to comply on a continuous basis with the funding framework;
- f) to comply with financial requirements;
- g) to comply with the HEAA 2022 and regulations made thereunder; and
- h) to comply with such other conditions as may be determined, with the approval of the HEA Board, by the HEA CEO.

The HEA reserves the right to terminate funding in circumstances such as, but not limited to, the following:

- a) if progress is unsatisfactory,
- b) if funds have not been used for the activities/research approved,
- c) if work has stopped on the research project,
- d) if reporting requirements are not adhered to,
- e) if the project team or project contravenes institutional and/or national policies, or
- f) if ethical approval is not granted where it is required.

Appendix 1: Eligible Costs

- Costs may include buy-out costs for staff already employed in the institutions hosting the project. No further funding will be made available during the course of a project to cover increases in salary costs.
- Salary costs may be sought for staff recruited onto a project. The staff employment and/or buy-out costs should be in accordance with institutional norms.¹
- Costs may include fees, consumables, travel and maintenance grants/stipends for graduate students and post-doctoral salaries which facilitate participation in the project. As the projects are of a maximum of 18 months duration, applicants must document the confirmed source of funding beyond the project lifetime for graduate student fees and stipends/maintenance.
- Postdoctoral and Research Assistant salaries must begin no lower than at the first point on the Irish Universities' Association salary scale or an equivalent.
- Inter-institutional visiting researcher's costs may also be included once clearly justified.
- Costs may be sought for third parties or consultants whose skills are crucial to the completion of the project (e.g. independent legal support, a digital archivist, public engagement practitioner, etc.). The necessity of these skillsets for the delivery of the project must be demonstrated in the application and steps should be taken to capture and share learnings with the HEI project partners.
- Requests for costs for community participants should align with institutional norms.
- Costs for small equipment (e.g. laptops) may be included but justification must be provided illustrating that the equipment is absolutely necessary to carry out the project and that such a facility is not available through other means project. All costs for equipment must clearly pertain to the proposal submitted to the Call. Costs for equipment that are not fundamental to an approved project will not be permitted.
- Modest institutional overheads may be included up to a maximum of 25% of pay costs (full-time personnel or full-time equivalency basis). Where a staff member is not working full-time on the project, overheads may be calculated on a pro rata basis. Research student stipends and equipment should not be included as pay

¹ HEIs should take into account the findings and recommendations of the *Second Review of Gender Equality* in relation to precarity.

for the purpose of overhead calculation. Institutions may submit a flat rate for overheads at the time of application, provided this does not exceed 25% of pay costs requested from the HEA budget, and is within the maximum overall funding request of €100,000.

- Other costs required must be specifically identified and justified, e.g., fieldwork, data collection, archives, open access publication, access to national infrastructures, etc.
- Costs to fund estates, room rental, or office space within or outside of an institution are not allowable expenses.
- Costs cannot be sought for seed funding to support further funding calls or sub-projects.
- No additional funding over and above agreed allocations to successful projects will be made available by the HEA.

Appendix 2: Eligible Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions that are eligible to apply as a **lead institution or partner institution** under this initiative are included below:

- Atlantic Technological University
- Dublin City University
- Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Mary Immaculate College
- Maynooth University
- Munster Technological University
- National College of Art and Design
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University of Medicine and Health Sciences
- South East Technological University
- Technological University Dublin
- Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Cork
- University College Dublin
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick

Higher education institutions and representative bodies that are eligible to apply as a **partner institution only** under this initiative are included below:

- Carlow College
- Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies
- National College of Ireland
- Irish Universities Association
- Technological Universities Association

Appendix 3: Investigator Core Competencies and Trauma Informed Organisation Principles

Investigator Core Competencies

1. Trauma informed
 - Understands the potential, wide-ranging impacts of trauma (and how trauma can lead to what may appear to be counter intuitive behaviours)
 - Provides a safe interview environment and engages with empathy with the reporting and reported parties.
 - Questioning style is open, and non-aggressive. Uses non-judgemental non-leading questions, focussed on fact finding. Understands how to avoid re-traumatisation.
 - Has awareness of their own biases and potential triggers, and the impact of their interpersonal behaviour.
 - Trauma informed report writing – is sensitive to the use of language and presents evidence in the words used by the parties (where possible), with care taken not to indicate any bias.
2. Understands and implements the core principles of procedural fairness in the conduct of the investigation, and in the supporting case management.
3. Fair and unbiased in the collection and assessment of all relevant and available evidence.
4. Communicates with the parties in a clear, unbiased and transparent fashion.
5. Deep knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence, and core concepts such as rape myths.
6. Awareness and knowledge of gender-based violence in a HEI context.
7. Capability to draft a reasoned investigation report, including summation and assessment of the evidence presented, and presentation of findings.

Trauma Informed Organisation

There is broad uniformity of the areas of an organisation that require attention in moving to or designing a Trauma Informed Organisation. These are:

- A safe physical, emotional environment to reduce the likelihood of increasing stress or escalating traumatic responses in service users.
- **Knowledge – Training** (specific to service provider staff and awareness across the organisation)
- **Well-being of ALL staff** with special provision for Clinical Staff
- **Policies and procedures** to be trauma informed proofed (includes Recruitment, clinical, administrative, leadership)
- **Leadership** to drive and support the trauma informed approach and also in how the governance, management and communication structures operate in line with the principles.
- **Engagement of stakeholders** through collaborative practice across role areas and in particular ensuring that service users are consulted and included in the design, delivery of services and evaluation of the organisation's overall trauma informed implementation actions.