Speak Out

Institutional Report

Year 1

October 2021 – October 2022

Introduction

Speak Out is an online report and support tool for the Higher Education Sector across Ireland. Speak Out provides a platform for students, staff and visitors to safely and anonymously report incidences of misconduct, including: bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, discrimination, hate crime, coercive behaviour or control, stalking, assault, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape. A Speak Out report can be made by the person directly affected or on behalf of someone else at. The link to RCSI's Speak Out tool is rcsi.speakout.ie and the resource directs users to support services available through RCSI and on a national basis.

Speak Out is the result of actions taken by student-facing support structures (e.g. student counsellors) and government policy initiatives. The Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education Ireland (PCHEI) developed the concept for Speak Out in response to the experience of counsellors across Ireland who found that students were finding it difficult to verbalise their experiences of sexual harassment and violence. Speak Out gained further support when the Department of Education and Skills launched a national policy called 'Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive - Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education'[1]. This policy framework, also known as the 'Consent Framework' or ESVH Framework, is now under the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The ESVH Framework tasks higher education institutions to develop an easy- to-use system for the disclosure and reporting of incidents of sexual harassment and violence, which is compatible with survivor rights, cognisant of the needs of vulnerable groups, and is underpinned by the confidence of the higher education community and a high-level of awareness among both staff and students[2]. Collecting evidence of these type of problem behaviours is an important pillar of the ESVH Framework; data generated by the Speak Out disclosures inform policy and shape targeted initiatives to drive and support cultural change. There is an acknowledgement that this type of data can be difficult to collect and reporting tools must be sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups, while building awareness and confidence across the higher education sector.

Speak Out is currently available to all staff, students, and visitors of the participating institutions: ATU, DCU, DkIT, IADT, MU, MTU, NCAD, NCI, University of Galway, RCSI, SETU, TCD, TU Dublin, TUS, UCC and UL. UCD provides a bespoke anonymous online reporting tool called Report and Support. Speak Out can be accessed via each participating institution's website.

Each HEI owns and manages their own data and annually submits a data report to the Speak Out Project Manager for the purposes of aggregating a national data set for analysis to improve understanding of the national landscape and trends. The first National Speak Out Report October 2021 – October 2022 was published in December 2023 and is available here: https://www.pchei.ie/speak-out-national-report. Individual participant HEIs can self-determine whether they will publish a local report and whether it will be available internally or externally. RCSI has used data available from the National Report and UCD to benchmark our Year 1 results.

Speak Out is part of RCSI's commitment to ensuring that everyone in the university community can work and learn in an environment defined by dignity and respect. It highlights the need for RCSI to take on the responsibility of creating a safe college community for all staff, students, and visitors. This information contributes to (1) inform policy and (2) create targeted educational initiatives in response

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[1] Government of Ireland (2019). Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive. Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions.
[2] Hand, K. (2023). Evaluation of Speak Out anonymous Report Tool Pilot. Available at: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/09/Speak_Out_Evaluation_Report_2023_for_publication-26.09.23.pdf

to the anonymous reports recorded. Importantly, this report serves to amplify the voices of those who have chosen to Speak Out and to trust RCSI with their experiences.

At the time of writing (April 2024), the HEA recently received confirmation government funding had been secured to establish a National Office for Speak Out. Once the National Office is in operation (it is anticipated that this will take place in Q2/Q3 2024), it is expected the compilation of a Year 2 report will be undertaken.

Results from Year One

This section highlights a selection of key results which are aligned with the information shared in the National Report.

A. Number of Reports by respondent type

Respondent Type	Number of Disclosures					
	National Report	RCSI	UCD	% of RCSI to National report	% of respondent type RCSI	% of respondent type UCD
Staff (Academic, Professional Managerial and Support Staff, Third Party, All Other)	219	7	44	3.2%	13%	36%
Student (Undergraduate, Postgraduate)	407	43	60	10.6%	81%	49%
Other (Visitor, Alumni, Other)	56	3	19	5%	6%	15%
Total	682	53	123	7.7%	100%	100%

The data shared in the National Report, UCD's Year 1 Report and RCSI's data indicate reports were made by staff, students and other community members. Respondents who identified as students made the majority of the reports.
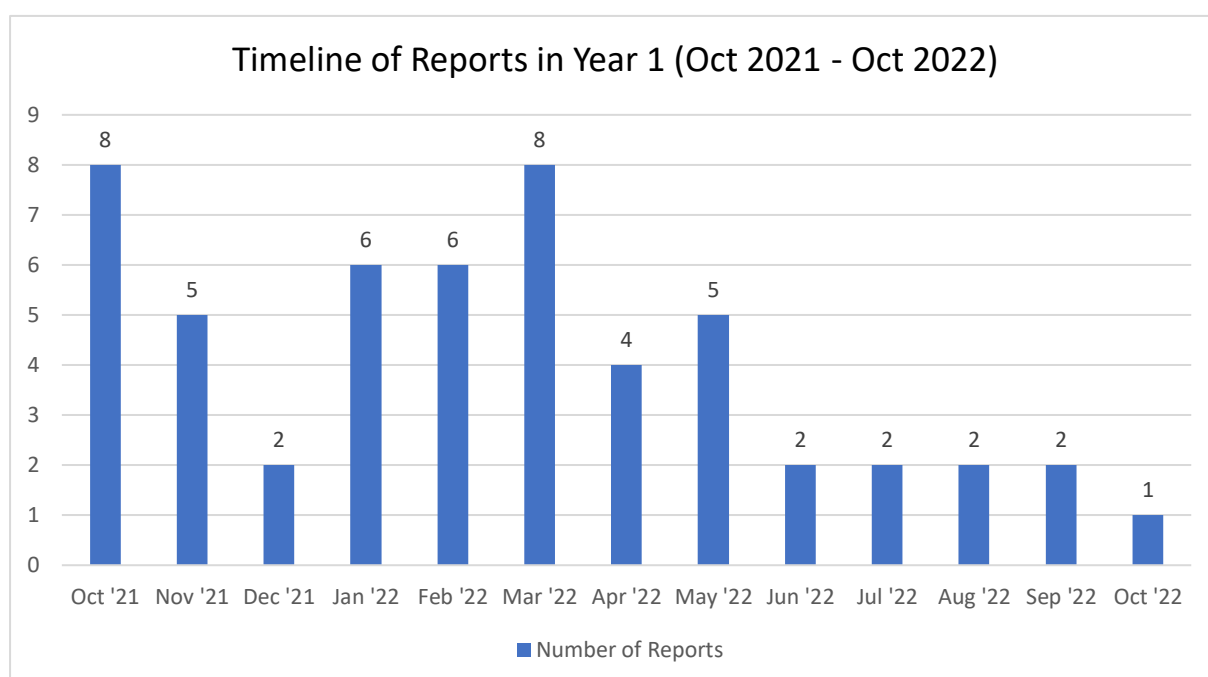
At the end of the questionnaire, respondents have the option to answer a series of demographic questions; 31 (or 59%) of the 53 respondents opted into the demographic question set. Of the 31

participants, 68% identified as female, 23% identified as male and 9% identified as gender non-conforming, non-binary or queer

Eighty-five per-cent (85%) of respondents indicated 'yes' when asked, 'Did the incident(s) take place while you (or the person affected) were a member of the college?' Of the remaining responses, 9% did not answer this question and 6% indicated 'no' or 'prefer not to say'.

B. Timeline of Reports

In the first year of Speak Out, there were a total of 53 reports. October 2021 and March 2022 had the highest number of reports (n=8). This perhaps coincides with the communications campaigns associated with the launch of Speak Out and further awareness-raising activities. There appears to be a trend that there are a greater number of reports made during term months (e.g. February, March, April) and fewer reports made out of term (e.g. December, June, July and August).

Timeline of Reports in Year 1 (Oct 2021 - Oct 2022)

Month	Number of Reports
Oct '21	8
Nov '21	5
Dec '21	2
Jan '22	6
Feb '22	6
Mar '22	8
Apr '22	4
May '22	5
Jun '22	2
Jul '22	2
Aug '22	2
Sep '22	2
Oct '22	1

C. Top 3 Behaviours Reported

	National Report: Staff	RCSI: Staff	National Report: Student	RCSI: Student
Behaviour 1	Bullying (137*)	Bullying (4)	Bullying (116)	Joint 1st: Bullying (19)
Behaviour 2	Harassment (61)	Coercive behaviour (2)	Harassment (114)	Joint 1st: Harassment (19)
Behaviour 3	Discrimination (46)	**	Sexual Assault (93)	Discrimination (11)

*The number in parentheses indicates the number of times the behaviour was reported.
**Behaviours 4, 5, 6, 7 each had one occurrence, thus no meaningful result.

Bullying and harassment featured most commonly in terms of overall reports both at RCSI and in the National Report.

Discrimination

In the National Report, incidences of discrimination were reported by 46 respondents identifying as staff and by 77 respondents identifying as students. At RCSI, the incidences of discrimination were reported by less than 10 respondents identifying as staff and 11 respondents identifying as students.

Sexual Assault

In the National Report, incidences of sexual assault were reported by less than 10 respondents identifying as staff and 93 respondents identifying as students. At RCSI, incidences of sexual assault were reported by less than 10 respondents identifying as a staff member and less than 10 respondents identifying as students.

D. Reports by location

Within Speak Out, respondents also have the option to disclose where the event took place (e.g. on campus, off-campus or online) with the ability to select more than one location.

The results from year 1 indicate the top three locations for incidents are: (1) on campus, (2) on placement/rotation and (3) online.

Count of Reports by Location

Location	Count
On college campus	46
Placement/Rotation	33
Online	17
Work-related social setting or event	9
Other	7
Non college related	6
At an academic event (field trip, conference, etc.)	5
Non college related accommodation	3
In official college accommodation (Lease signed with…	3
At a society/club/SU event	3
Non college related event	2
Professional Internship	2
Prefer not to say	1
Freshers week event	1
In another college property	1
Orientation event	1

E. Top reasons for not reporting to HEI

As part of the disclosure questionnaire, respondents are also asked about why they may or may not have formally reported the incident to their HEI.

Both RCSI and the National Report shared the number one reason for not reporting to your institution: 'I fear that nothing would be done if I make a complaint.'

Both RCSI and the National Report had the following two reasons in their top 5: 'I want to make the college aware of the incident but don't want to come forward or pursue it formally' and 'I have concerns it might affect my current/future career'.

The National Report's top five reasons for not reporting an incident are:

	National Report: Reasons for not reporting to HEI	% of total reports*
1.	I fear that nothing would be done if I make a complaint	46%
2.	I cannot prove the behaviour took place	31%
3.	I want to make the college aware of the incident but don't want to come forward or pursue it formally	25%
4.	I have concerns it might affect my current/future career	25%
5.	I'm worried I won't be believed	21%

*Respondents are allowed to select more than one response/reason to answer this question.

RCSI's top five reasons for not reporting an incident are:

	RCSI: Reasons for not reporting to HEI (n=53)	% of total reports*
1.	I fear that nothing would be done if I make a complaint	48%
2.	I have concerns it might affect my current/future career	38%
3.	I want to make the college aware of the incident but don't want to come forward or pursue it formally	33%
4.	I am worried about being called a troublemaker	31%
5.	I don't know how to make a complaint	25%

*Respondents are allowed to select more than one response/reason to answer this question.

At RCSI, the top five reasons for not reporting to the HEI by respondents identifying as staff are:
1. I am worried about being called a troublemaker.
2. I have concerns it might affect my current/future career.
3. I want to make the college aware of the incident but don't want to come forward or pursue it formally.
4. I'm worried the perpetrator(s) would retaliate.
5. I fear that nothing would be done if I make a complaint.

At RCSI, the top five reasons for not reporting to the HEI by respondents identifying as students are:
1. I fear that nothing would be done if I make a complaint.
2. I have concerns it might affect my current/future career.
3. I want to make the college aware of the incident but don't want to come forward or pursue it formally.
4. I don't know how to make a complaint.
5. I cannot prove the behaviour took place.

Thirty-five (35) of the 53 respondents indicated they had sought support from outside of RCSI (e.g. a friend or family member) or will seek support 'having been made aware of the supports available through this tool'.

F. Bystander Intervention

The Speak Out tool includes questions regarding bystanders: (1) were there any witnesses to the incident and (2) did they intervene.

	(1) Witness to Incident					(2) Witness Intervention				
	No	Don't Know	Somewhat	Yes	PNTS	No	Don't Know	Somewhat	Yes	PNTS
Students	6	2	9	26	0	28	1	3	2	1
Staff	2	0	1	4	0	2	0	2	1	0
Visitor/Other	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0

Respondents in 41 of the 53 reports indicated there was 'somewhat' or 'yes' to there being a witness to the incident. However, only in 9 of the reports did the respondent indicate either 'somewhat' or 'yes' to a witness intervening. While there was a witness in 77% of incidents, only 17% of reports indicated the witness intervened.

Conclusions

The analysis of the Speak Out data highlights the need to:

- Increase knowledge and awareness: continue raising awareness about reporting channels so everyone knows how to make a complaint
- Increase reporting mechanisms: provide opportunities for anonymous reporting such as Speak Out so that instances can be reported for institutional awareness and learning, alongside formal complaints
- Increase trust: build confidence that instances are dealt with seriously and according to transparent and fair protocols. This will involve periodically outlining the types of issues, and numbers of cases, being dealt with, while managing the confidentiality of individual cases. This will need to happen in diverse locations and over time so staff and students hear the messages.
- Increase skills: training and guidelines for staff and students, particularly in the first instance leaders, should be undertaken to foster a culture that is inclusive and fair, and that RCSI does not tolerate the various forms of bullying and discrimination reported here.
- Increase prevention: Ultimately, the goal of all of these actions is to address inappropriate behavior as well as to prevent such behaviour in the first instance.

Since the Speak Out data analysis has been conducted, RCSI has taken the following actions:

- Increase knowledge and awareness: Clearer signposting to reporting channels and supports
  - Dedicated awareness campaigns: Sexual Health and Wellbeing and Sexual Abuse & Sexual Violence Awareness

- - Presentations and regular updates to Academic Council and Senior Management Team on initiatives
- Increase reporting mechanisms: to address in session on positive and safe university culture at upcoming Senior Leadership Group meeting in July 2024
- Increase trust: Identify Bystander Intervention staff champions across all departments/schools
- Increase skills: Development and launch of bespoke Bystander Intervention training for students and staff
- Increase prevention: Focus on developing a culture of intervention to prevent or interrupt inappropriate behaviour
- Launch of three-year ESP Action Plan in January 2023

To those who have used the Speak Out tool, we thank you for your trust. We believe you, we stand with you, and we will support you.