



UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH



SPEAK OUT



We Hear You,
We Believe You,
We will Support You,

**Speak Out Annual Report
October 2021 - October 2022**

<https://ul.speakout.ie>

Background

The 2019 Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutions: [Safe, Respectful, Supportive and Positive – Ending Sexual Violence & Harassment in HEI's](#) outlined the need for data to be collected on the incidence rates of sexual harassment and sexual violence across the higher education sector.

In response to this need, the Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland (PCHEI), funded by the Department of Further and higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, led the Speak Out project.

This pilot project, supported by the Higher education Authority Centre of excellence for equality, Diversity and inclusion is a groundbreaking initiative which is underpinned by an ethos of cross institutional collaboration in response to such incidences within higher education institutions.

The University of Limerick welcomed this new initiative. Implementing the Speak Out tool in our institution emphasises our commitment to fostering a safe and secure environment for all in our community.

The key goals of Speak Out are to:

- Provide a space for staff, students, and visitors to safely speak out about their experiences of harassment, discrimination and assault;
- Promote the visibility of the support services and other options available to staff, students, and visitors to the institution;
- Contribute to the sectoral efforts to monitor & report on trends of reported behaviours across HEIs;
- Ensure policy and procedures are informed by the experiences of HEI communities and are accessible to all members;
- Inform communications campaigns to positively influence respectful and supportive campus cultures;
- Develop evidence-informed, customised training programmes informed by analysis of the data reported.

Speak Out is currently available for staff, students, and visitors in 16 institutions across Ireland.

Data

This report outlines key findings taken from an analysis of the aggregated data collected in University of Limerick from October 2021 to October 2022. This data represents the lived experiences of 37 individuals and every attempt has been made to safeguard the anonymity of these individuals; no data containing fewer than 10 responses will be included in this report.

In terms of gender breakdown, over 32% of reporters were female, with 46% opting to answer “prefer not to say” when asked to specify their gender.

It is important to note that the number of reports submitted through Speak Out doesn't directly mirror the prevalence of these behaviours. The reality of the situation is that it is likely to be much higher than what is reported here.

Total Reports

A total number of 37 individuals made an anonymous report to the University of Limerick via the Speak Out tool during the first twelve months. Of these 37 reports, 27 individuals reported on behalf of themselves, while 10 reported on behalf of someone else. The table below gives a further breakdown of these 37 individuals.

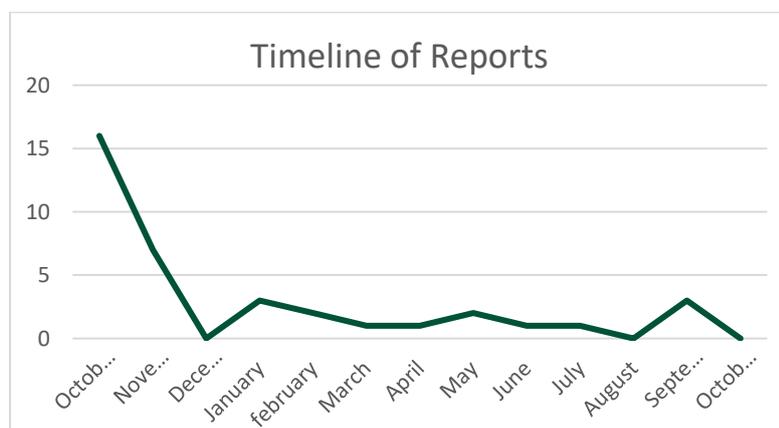
Figure 1: Total Number of Reports

	Number of Reports
Staff (Academic, Professional Managerial and Support Staff, Third Party, All Other)	<10
Student (Undergraduate, Postgraduate)	23
Other (Visitor, Alumni, Other)	<10
Total	37

Timeline of Reports

Upon its launch, the Speak Out Tool experienced a surge in reports during the initial two months. Subsequently, there was a noticeable decline, followed by a slight increase at the start of each semester both in January 2022, and September 2022. However, there was no pattern in terms of the individuals reporting and their connection to the university.

Figure 2: Timeline of Reports Submitted



Behaviours

As you can see in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below, Speak Out revealed that staff predominantly reported instances of bullying and discrimination. Meanwhile, students were more frequently affected by harassment, bullying and sexual assault, indicating distinct behavioural concerns within these two groups. Over 70% of the reported incidents occurred while the reporter was a member of the university.

Understanding these patterns is crucial for targeted interventions and creating a safer environment for all members of the UL community.

Figure 3: Top 3 Behaviours Reported by Staff

Type of Behaviour (Staff)	Total Reports
Discrimination	<10
Other	<10
Bullying	<10
Total	<10

Figure 4: Top 3 Behaviours Reported by Students

Type of Behaviour (Student)	Total Reports
Harassment	<10
Bullying	<10
Sexual Assault	<10
Total	18

The below list details the behaviours listed, and the definition provided for the behaviour within Speak Out.

Bullying

Bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour that undermines your right to dignity at work. It usually takes place over a period of time. It can be done by one or more persons, and it is aimed at an individual or a group to make them feel inferior to other people.

Cyberbullying

Is when the act of bullying is carried out online, including via text.

Harassment

Harassment is unwanted behaviour which you find offensive, or which makes you feel intimidated or humiliated. It can happen on its own or alongside other forms of discrimination.

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as occurring where a person is treated less favourably than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any one of the following grounds: age, civil status, disability, family status, gender, membership of the Traveller community, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. Discrimination can be direct or indirect.

Hate Crime

A hate crime is a prejudice-motivated crime which occurs when a perpetrator targets a victim because of their membership (or perceived membership) of any of the protected grounds; age, civil status,

disability, family status, gender, membership of the Traveller community, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status.

Coercive Behaviour

This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of repeated, unwanted behaviour that occurs as a result of fixation. This creates fear, sadness, anxiety and threatens the safety of the other person. Stalking can happen with or without a fear of violence.

Assault

An assault is when someone directly or indirectly applies force to or causes an impact on the body of another or causes another to believe that they are likely immediately to be subjected to any such force or impact.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes any act of physical intimacy, request for sexual favours, other act or conduct including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, picture or other material that is unwelcome and could reasonably be regarded as sexually offensive, humiliating, or intimidating.

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault includes any sexual touching without consent, or with fear or threat of an assault.

Aggravated sexual assault includes serious violence or the threat of serious violence or is such as to cause injury, humiliation, or degradation of a grave nature to the person assaulted.

Rape

Rape is the penetration of the anus, mouth, or vagina, however slight, by a penis or any object held or manipulated by another person, with the absence of consent.

The absence of consent includes when a person knows that the other person does not consent or is reckless as to whether they have consented or not.

Location

People making a report were asked “Where did the incident(s) take place”. Figure 5 highlights the most prevalent responses for this question. Individuals were given the option of selecting multiple answers to this question in the instance that they may be reporting several incidents which may have taken place across a number of locations.

Identifying specific locations where these negative behaviours occurred is important for targeted intervention and prevention efforts. It allows us to implement tailored strategies to address and mitigate instances of negative behaviour.

Zero responses were given for the following: at an academic event (field trip, conference etc.), clinical placement/rotation, professional internship, at a society/club/SU event, Rag Week event, Freshers Week event, oversea college campus/Erasmus programme, sports event organized by college.

Figure 5: Location of incidents

Location	Total
On College Campus	23
In Official College Accommodation	<10
Online	<10
Total	37

Below details the full list of answers that were provided to those speaking out.

- On college campus
- In official college accommodation (Lease signed with Institution)
- In another college property
- At an academic event (field trip, conference, etc.)
- Placement/Rotation
- Professional Internship
- At a society/club/SU event
- RAG week event
- Orientation event
- Freshers’ week event
- Trip away organised by SU/Club/Society
- Sports event organised by College
- Overseas college campus/Erasmus programme
- Non college related event
- Non college related accommodation
- Non college related
- Online
- Work-related social setting or event
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Reports

When asked “Did you make a formal report to the college?”, the majority of reporters answered “no”. These reporters were then asked to elaborate on what impacted their decision to make a formal report. The most common reasons are cited in figure 6 below. There was a similar response of “no” when asked “Did you make a formal report to the Gardaí?”, with similar reasoning given for not reporting to the Gardaí also. Another frequent response given for not reporting to the gardaí was “I cannot prove the behaviour took place.”

Figure 6: Most Common Reasons Not Reported to College

Reasons not Reported to College	Total
I fear that nothing would be done if I make a complaint	15
I want to make the college aware of the incident but don't want to come forward or pursue it formally	<10
I feel it's not serious enough to make a complaint	<10
Total	32

Addressing these apprehensions is key to creating a supportive reporting system that ensures confidentiality, responsiveness, and a clear understanding that all experiences, regardless of perceived severity, are taken seriously.

For those who answered “yes” to “Did you make a formal report to the college?” when asked “what enabled/motivated you make the report to the college?” The most common response was “knowledge of procedures”. When asked a similar question in relation to the gardaí, the most common response was “suggested/supported by colleague/classmate/family/friend” along with, “want the person(s) to be held accountable”.

Witnesses to incidents

Over 64% of reporters said “yes” or “somewhat” when asked was there a witness present during the incident(s) reported. Following on from this question, reporters were then asked if these witnesses had intervened on their behalf, 79% answered “no” to this question.

This is a significant indication that Bystander Intervention training needs to be rolled out across our university for both staff and students to highlight that it takes a whole campus approach, where everyone has a responsibility, to drive the culture change we seek.

Supports

Reporters were asked to answer, “Have you sought support”. It’s notable that individuals often seek support beyond institutional channels, with the most common responses to this question outlined in figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Have you sought support?

Those who have sought support
Yes, I have sought support from a friend/family member.
Yes, I have sought support from an external organisation.
Yes, I have sought support from elsewhere in the college.
No, but having been made aware of the supports available through this tool I will seek support soon.

Next Steps

We will continue to have Speak Out available here in the University of Limerick for all staff, students, and visitors.

Emphasising the importance of Speak Out within the university, the primary goal is to enhance awareness and encourage widespread adoption across our community. This is crucial for building trust among potential users, especially those identified as most vulnerable or at risk. To do this we need to increase the visibility of the Speak Out tool across our campus.

The analysed data will serve as a foundational cornerstone in the development and implementation of targeted awareness raising and educational trainings and workshops. By delving into the insights gleaned from the pilot data, we gained nuanced understanding of the specific challenges and areas of concern related to harassment and violence within our university community.

This data driven approach enables us to tailor content that directly addresses the identified needs and nuances, ensuring relevance and effectiveness. Whether it be communication strategies, setting boundaries and articulating those boundaries, or bystander intervention, the data guides the creation of a comprehensive training programme. The workshops will provide practical tools, foster dialogue, and empower participants with the knowledge needed to navigate and contribute to a safer, more respectful campus environment. In essence, this data serves as a compass, guiding deliberate design and implementation educational initiatives that resonate with the unique dynamics of our university.

By publicising this data, we aim to reaffirm the University of Limerick’s unwavering commitment to the wellbeing of our community. Transparency in sharing this data not only demonstrates accountability but also signifies our dedication to addressing and combating these issues. Public awareness fosters a culture of openness, encouraging survivors and witnesses to come forward with confidence, knowing that their concerns are taken seriously. Moreover, this transparency holds the university accountable for implementing effective measures based on insights gained, fostering an

environment where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported. Ultimately, publicising this data aligns with our commitment to creating a campus community that stands firmly against any form of harassment or violence, emphasising the importance of fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all.

Finally, to the 37 individuals who came forward and placed their trust in the Speak Out tool, we thank you for your courage. By coming forward you have taken an active role in creating a community where everyone's voice is heard, respected, and contributes to positive change.

We Hear You, We Believe You, We Will Support You!