

## Press release

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# Ministers Harris and McEntee announce 5-year Active\* Consent programme

From [Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science \(/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science/\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science/); Department of Justice

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Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris has today launched a five-year Active\* Consent programme.

This programme builds on the first cycle of the Active\*Consent programme at the University of Galway, which has made substantial progress in raising awareness and deepening our understanding of consent in Higher and Further Education Institutions across the country.

Speaking at the launch today, Minister Harris said:

“It is essential we equip the next generation with the skillset and the knowledge needed on consent.

“This programme has already been incredibly successful in schools and further and higher education institutions across the country.

“The launch of this Active\*Consent Programme is another step towards tackling an extremely serious issue that can have lifelong consequences for the victims.

“It is one of my top priorities to ensure that we create campus cultures which are safe, respectful, and supportive for all staff and students.

“I want to emphasise to everyone that 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, increased awareness, and greater care for victims.

“Staff and students are entitled to a safe environment to study and work, free from harassment or violence. Education and awareness-raising are invaluable steps in achieving this.

“Together we can create a new cultural norm in this country - one which is about equality for women and men, respect, dignity, informed opinions and behaviours, safety and the freedom to live our lives to the fullest, free from fear.”

The Active\* Consent initiative is jointly supported by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science and the Department of Justice. Funding for the programme has come from the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Minister for Justice Helen McEntee said:

“To contribute to reducing levels of sexual violence we need to raise awareness of the importance of consent in healthy sexual relationships.

“And as part of our national Strategy to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, we are working to change societal thinking about what is acceptable in terms of attitudes and behaviours around respectful sexual and intimate behaviour.

“We also recognise that there is a need to equip people with the tools to react appropriately if someone tells them they’ve been a victim of sexual harassment or assault. Active\* Consent is, and has been, doing fantastic work in these areas.

“My Department supports the work of Active\* Consent and other campaigns such as We Consent from Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, and is actively considering other options to inform the public as we collectively work towards a national, shared understanding of what healthy sexual consent is.”

More than 70,000 first year college students participated in a consent workshop between 2019 and 2022, and more than 1,500 staff member and student leaders have been trained as workshop facilitators.

More than 4,000 post-primary pupils also took part in consent workshops during the first 12 months of the Active\* Consent for School Communities programme in 2021-2022, with 750 teachers trained in delivering these workshops and 1,000 parents attended online seminars.

At today’s event, Active\* Consent will discuss their next chapter, including plans to generate the knowledge we need to keep progressing on social change, and for research-based positive sexual well-being initiatives that address the needs of young people, professionals, and parents.

The Active\* Consent programme at the University of Galway has been working in the area of education and research on sexual consent since 2013 and began the Active\* Consent programme in 2019 working with higher education institutions, schools and sports organisations.

Dr Pádraig McNeela, University of Galway lecturer and Active\* Consent Team Co-lead, said:

“Working together with partners such as Galway Rape Crisis Centre, our team designed approximately 20 different resources in the past four years, that take a learning community from brief social media messaging, to consent workshops and arts-based interventions, and on to the specialised training that enables staff members to lead a consent project.”

The Active\* Consent programme collaborates with Rugby Players Ireland, the collective voice of professional rugby players in Ireland. As part of the Player Development Programme, Active\*Consent provides education and awareness-raising workshops and resources to players, encouraging open conversations on healthy relationships, emotional expression and personal responsibility.

During the next cycle of the programme from 2023-2027, Active\* Consent will develop an international outreach project for Higher Education, expand its training to the private and public sector, and continue to work with schools, colleges, sports and community organisations throughout Ireland.

Under their research strand, the team will initiate new research that focuses on how ideas and roles concerning consent evolve for teenagers and young men.

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## Notes

### Active Consent and Bystander Programmes

- In the academic year 2019-2020, 7,306 students attended the Active\* Consent workshop
- In the academic year 2022-2023, confirmed numbers so far this year of 22,569 students attended the Active\* Consent workshops

## Funding

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Supported by Lifes2good Foundation and the University of Galway Strategic Fund, the 2023-2027 programme will extend and expand on a decade of efforts to empower schools, colleges, and sports as the key settings for young people to learn about consent.

## Active\*Consent Team

The Active\* Consent programme is led by a team at NUI Galway comprising:

- Dr Padraig MacNeela, Senior Lecturer at the School of Psychology
- Dr Charlotte McIvor, Senior Lecturer, Discipline of Drama & Theatre Studies
- Dr Siobhán O'Higgins, Research Fellow at the School of Psychology

The programme is organised into Research, Outreach, and Communication teams, and staffed by researchers and practitioners from backgrounds including psychology, drama studies, health promotion, and communications.

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