

# Policies and Strategies before Congress

In addition to motions, it is possible to propose a Strategy or Policy to Congress.

These are typically too long to include in the Congress Document, so they are included in this addendum. Where these policies are further published, it is normal for additional information about the aims and mandate of USI to be included. For the sake of brevity, they are excluded from this document.

## Combating Cyberbullying in Third Level

### Background of the policy

With increasing use of social media there are more risks for young people to become targets, victims or even aggressors of cyber-bullying. Technology's progression is often equated with the advancement of human societies and in turn has changed the way people interact. This is not always a positive thing as we look at how traditional bullying has evolved into an issue today known as cyber-bullying. While traditional bullying has been studied at length in recent years, it is evident there is currently less known about cyber-bullying (Donegan, 2012). Cyber-bullying has been defined as "wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Donegan also observed that, unlike traditional bullying, cyber-bullying allows the offender to mask his or her identity behind a computer. This anonymity makes it easier for the offender to strike blows against a victim without having to see the victim's physical response.

Now more than ever with the evolution of social media, apps such as Snapchat make it quicker and easier to share media than ever before. Facebook with their many sub groups and instant messaging, it is now commonplace to share media in an instant. Objectification of social media personas, user content and contact information have become rampant, with college groups such as "Bird of the Day", apps such as "Yik Yak" and the anonymity that comes with it has given users more power to share information and media without consequence.

The online sphere has become a free for all and without proper education and legislation, it will continue have devastating effects on victims of online harassment, cyber bullying (anonymous or otherwise) and revenge porn.

### Revenge Porn

Revenge porn, also known as non-consensual pornography, is when someone distributes sexual images or videos of another person, without the permission or consent of that person. It might be done by a partner or ex-partner, a friend, colleague, or hacker.

Social Media is the single most used medium for the transfer of images and videos that constitute revenge porn. Revenge porn can have a detrimental effect on the person/persons mental state and is a direct breach of their consent to share such media.

### Legislation

With the lack of specific legislation around revenge porn and online harassment, it is important to seek effective legislation to deal with issues that are arising from cyber bullying and revenge porn.

As it stands it currently falls under the heading of harassment, which is legislated for in Section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act (1997).

Section 10 states:

*(1) Any person who, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, by any means including by use of the telephone, harasses another by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with him or her, shall be guilty of an offence.*

## Data

According to the Central statistics office(2015) there was 451 recorded suicides, down 8 from the previous year. This resulted in the suicide rate dropping from 10 to 9.7 per 100,000 of the population.

Nevertheless, the rate has actually increased across all regions except Leinster which has the highest population density. These figures also show a disparity in terms of urban versus rural areas.

For example there were no recorded suicides in Waterford city in 2015, the suicide rate in Co Waterford more than doubled from 8.8 in 2014 to 19 last year.

A similar difference was evident in Co Galway, where the rate jumped from 10.2 to 17.4 compared to a more modest increase in the city, where it rose from 11.1 in 2014 to 12.7 last year. The suicide rate in Limerick city dipped to 16 from 23 in 2014, while the rate more than doubled in county Limerick, up to 12.7 from 5.2 in 2014.

In recent years Irish media highlighted a number of cases where Irish teenagers died by suicide in what is suspected as possible results of cyberbullying. Following key objectives of USI's Mental Health Strategy 2014-2017 'More Talk More Action' ' it is imperative that USI keeps suicide prevention as a key objective and aims to make "college communities safe and suicide aware for all students". There needs to be awareness and education among young people in relation to how the words which they say online and the media that they share can have both positive and negative impacts towards, not only themselves, but also to other people around them. Young people need to be encouraged to think before they type, and to ask for help and respond wisely.

\* Provisional data – figure subject to future revision

## Definitions

### Bullying

Bullying is defined by the Department of Education and Skills guidelines as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. Placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people is also regarded as bullying behaviour.(Citizens Information - 2017)

Cyberbullying refers to bullying which is carried out using the internet, mobile phone or other technological devices. Cyber Bullying generally takes a psychological rather than physical form but is often part of a wider pattern of 'traditional' bullying. It can take the form of exclusion, defamation, intimidation, impersonation or sending nasty or threatening messages, emails, photos or video clips; silent phone calls; putting up nasty posts or pictures on a message board, website or chat room; saying hurtful things in a chat room; pretending to be someone else in a chat room or message

board or text message and saying hurtful things; or accessing someone's accounts to make trouble for them (Get With It, 2012).

### Purpose of the policy

This policy outlines the importance of educating students and the need to raise awareness on the issues of cyberbullying and the devastating effects of revenge porn. Though Cyberbullying and its effects have only come to the forefront in the national conversation recently, it is evident this has been an issue affecting the youth of Ireland for some years. Furthermore, it advocates the need for policy on cyberbullying at a local level by Students' Unions and Higher Education Institutions.

### USI Cyber Bullying Charter:

#### What behaviour you expect online

- *To be treated with respect and consideration.*
- *To be supported and helped should you need it*
- *Not to be scammed, hacked or have personal details shared without your permission*
- What behaviour is expected of you online
- *That you treat others with respect and consideration*
- *That you are mindful of the human behind the computer*
- *To support those who need it as you would do in 'real life'*

### Action Points of policy

#### Training, Awareness and Education:

##### *Aims*

To assist local Students' Union Officers in their work on raising awareness of cyberbullying and with students who are victims of cyberbullying.

To provide information about cyber-bullying that educates students to think before they type, or share illicit content without consent and to intervene if they see a peer being victimised on the internet.

##### *Actions*

#### USI will:

- Ensure a training module is provided for all Students' Union Officers on cyber-bullying.
- Assist SU Officers in investigating the possibility of working together to provide training on cyber-bullying to staff and class representatives.
- Co-ordinate an online cyber-bullying campaign, targeted at third level students and to continuously build on it.
- To run an information campaign on how to look after your mental health while online and how to deal with the negative effects it may have on your wellbeing.
- Include information and resources on the identification, prevention, response and reporting of cyber-bullying.
- Work closely with a range of youth organisations that are working on this topic and build on existing partnerships.
- Survey third level students on the instances and effects of cyberbullying and to present the results to Minister for Education and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications in relation to abuse of social media, revenge porn and cyberbullying.

Local Policy:

*Aim:*

To ensure Students' Unions across the country have a cyberbullying policy for instances when a student will bring a case to their Students' Union attention.

*Actions:*

USI will:

- Support Member Organisations (MOs) in developing a cyberbullying policy for their Union.
- To provide support and guidance to MOs to bring said policy to their Governing Authority for adoption and to add on to existing policies covering bullying and harassment.
- Responsibility for the Cyberbullying Policy
- Unless otherwise stated, USI Officer Board is responsible for the implementation of the USI Cyber Bullying Policy. The USI Welfare Officer shall provide any support needed by MOs to implement their own Cyberbullying policies.
- This policy will be reviewed at the end of each academic year by USI Officer Board and any changes will be subject to approval by National Council.

References:

- 'Action Plan On Bullying' – Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the Minister for Education and Skills (2013) Available at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Action-Plan-On-Bullying-2013.pdf>
- Donegan, Richard. (2012) Bullying and Cyberbullying: History, Statistics, Law, Prevention and Analysis. The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications, 3(1), 33-42.
- 'Get With It – A Guide to Cyberbullying'. A joint initiative by the Office for Internet Safety, O2, Barnardos and the National Centre for Technology in Education (2012)
- National Suicide Research Foundation Ireland – Suicides in Republic of Ireland from 2001-2011. Available at: <http://www.nsrif.ie/cms/?q=node/36>
- Sameer Hinduja & Justin W. Patchin, (2010), Cyberbullying: Identification, Prevention, and Response. Available at: [http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying\\_Identification\\_Prevention\\_Response\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Identification_Prevention_Response_Fact_Sheet.pdf)
- Trinity College Dublin – Respect & Dignity Policy Available at: <http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/respect.php>
- Murphy et al. (2011) USI Mental Health Strategy 2010-2013 – 'Student Lives, Minds & Wellbeing'
- <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/data-on-suicides-nationwide-reveals-sharp-differences-1.2667609>
- [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/attendance\\_and\\_discipline\\_in\\_schools/bullying\\_in\\_schools\\_in\\_ireland.html#le11ee](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/attendance_and_discipline_in_schools/bullying_in_schools_in_ireland.html#le11ee)

## USI Student Accommodation Strategy (2016 – 2019)

### Collaborations and Partnerships

*USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to accommodation supports. USI recognises the need to work with others in the sector to further our aims and ambitions.*

### Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of accommodation support.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions and external organisations to support students in seeking accommodation and solving tenancy issues.
- To build a coalition for effective lobbying for investment into purpose built student accommodation.
- To support students in seeking help and advice in relation to accommodation issues and where necessary submit a formal complaint.

### Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
- Sustain membership to committees, such as PRTB.
- Establish a point of contact within the PRTB and Threshold for Students' Unions.
- Liaise with various organisations to promote Anti-bullying awareness, disclosure training and any other relevant training to Student Residence staff to ensure that staff are trained and able to deal with any issues that may arise for students living in affiliated Student residences.
- Liaise with the legislation working group to lobby for a reform in digs accommodation rights.
- USI will collaborate with NUS-OUSI to ensure that where areas of work overlap within their policy file and priorities that the support and execution of specific projects from or with USI is reflected within NUS-USI's plan of work.

### Suggested Action For Students' Unions:

- Aim, where possible, to establish links with local organisations and resources, and promote local supports to students in campus community.
- Maintain a relationship with local residential groups to ensure lines of communication remain open to deal with any anti-social behaviour issues, etc.

### Training and Supports - Students' Unions

*USI encourages students' unions to run campaigns and/or distribute information to students on accommodation rights and responsibilities.*

### Objectives:

- To equip Students' Unions with the skills and information needed to form campaigns to inform students of their rights and responsibilities as tenants.
- To equip Officers in their work in relation to accommodation.
- For Students' Union Officers to be equipped to support fellow students who are experiencing accommodation issues.

### Actions:

- Provide training for relevant officers during the summer term in accommodation issues.
- Support officers in establishing links with local, community based support services.
- Support Students' Unions' Officers to be equipped with gaining the skills and information necessary to develop and review campus policy and to represent students on management committees through organising trainings with relevant partners.

### Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
- Aim to establish local links with community based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
- Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to student accommodation.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing accommodation policies.
- Aim to establish a committee to review accommodation issues in institution catchment area.

### Funding and Availability

*For many students, having affordable and fit-for-purpose accommodation is a prerequisite for attending college. USI recognises accommodation as a right not a privilege. A combination of private sector rent price increases alongside the continuing shortfall in purpose built student accommodation will fuel a non-progression culture in third level education unless immediate action is taken.*

### Objectives:

- To promote investment in purpose built student accommodation.
- To discourage the discrimination towards student tenants.

### Actions:

- Lobby the Government to prepare a further short term solution such as the use of Nama-owned properties to temporarily ease the accommodation burden.
- Lobby the Government to create a Student Housing strategy to complement the Construction Strategy.
- Lobby for the introduction of a Student Accommodation Irish Student Housing Trust.
- Lobby the Government to amend part 3 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to include a provision that allows for students' unions or other representative bodies to have legal standing to challenge on behalf of their membership the introduction of new rents in purpose built student accommodation centres, where those rents are raised outside of term time.
- Lobby the Government to amend the equal status act to include discrimination relating to students in the provision of accommodation as one of the grounds.
- Lobby for student accommodation to be recognised under incentives to build social housing.

### Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, partake in lobbying opportunities both nationally and locally and nationally with support from USI.

### Support Services and Information Campaigns

*The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in supporting students to find appropriate accommodation. The promotion of these services is equally important to inform students of their availability and encourage them to seek help when needed.*

### Objectives:

- To improve access to good quality accommodation services for students.
- To liaise with external organisations such as PRTB and Threshold to provide support to students experiencing difficulties with accommodation.

#### Actions:

- Lobby to establish a point of contact within the PRTB and Threshold for officers to contact regarding students' accommodation issues.
- Liaise with on campus accommodation services to continue the work in screening scams and alerting services to them.
- Co-ordinate an information campaigns on tenant rights and responsibilities to complement the accommodation and finance guide.

#### Suggested Action For Students' Unions:

- Where possible, co-ordinate local campaigns on campus level to improve access to good quality accommodation services for students and disseminate information on tenant rights and responsibilities along with the distribution of the accommodation and finance guide.

#### Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

*It is vital for USI to review progress under the Accommodation Strategy on an annual basis. By providing basic annual progress reports on the action points outlined in the strategy, progress and effect can be tracked and with the provision of annual reviews, updates or changes can be suggested if deemed necessary.*

#### Objectives:

- To monitor the impact of USI campaigns to inform students on their rights and responsibilities as tenants.
- To evaluate and review each campaign yearly and to update the strategy accordingly.
- To assess the housing situation of students across the country.

#### Actions:

- Map progress of the strategy and produce a yearly progress update document.
- RTo review all campaigns and evaluate impact with support from external expert groups.
- Co-ordinate a survey to collect data on local accommodation issues for students' unions on a local level.
- Launch the national survey to collect data on student accommodation across Ireland.

#### Suggested Action For Students' Unions:

- Where possible, review local campaigns on campus level to ensure messaging is effective, appropriate and relevant to students.
- Support USI in dissemination of the national survey to facilitate data collection across Higher Education Institutions in Ireland.