

Action Plan on Drug Use in Higher Education Institutions

The Report of the Rapid Response Group (RRG) on use of illicit substances within Higher Education - Submitted for consideration to Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. Minister of State for Higher Education on the 20th November 2019.

Contents

Foreword by Minister	2
Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Societal Context	5
The National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2017-2025 – Reducing Harm and Supporting Recovery.....	7
Adverse consequences of drug use	9
Current Higher Education Landscape	9
Student services in HEIs	10
The Student Perspective	11
Recommendations - Action points.....	12
Institutional Leadership	13
Student Engagement	13
Community Engagement	14
Service Provision	15
Conclusion.....	16
Appendix 1 - RRG members	17
Appendix 2 - Examples of current initiatives	18
The Healthy Campus initiative	18
REACT	18
Campus Watch	18
HSE/Drugs.ie Harm Reduction Campaigns.....	19
Safer Student Nights Campaign 2019	19
USI publications	20
Examples of initiatives in individual HEIs.....	20
Appendix 3 – Samples of Policy Documents for reference.....	23
Appendix 4 - References	25

Foreword by Minister

In the Event that the Minister decides to publish this report, the RRG would welcome the addition of a forwarding statement from the Minister

Executive summary

The Rapid Response Group met on a number of occasions during the months of October and November 2019. The report that follows sets out the context to the problem of drug use facing students in our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The RRG looked at a number of examples of existing good practice in our sector but it is acknowledged the examples provided are by no means exhaustive. Drawing on these examples, the experience of the team assembled, and the learnings from both existing research the RRG developed sixteen suggested actions categorised under the headings Institutional Leadership, Student Engagement, Community Engagement and Service Provision. Of these suggested actions the four leading actions that all HEIs are recommended to undertake are:

Each Higher Education Institution should develop a Drug and Alcohol policy specific to the HEI.

Each Higher Education Institution should develop and implement a Drug and Alcohol Action Plan specific to the HEI.

Each Higher Education Institution should assign to a Senior Officer of the HEI, the responsibility for leading the development of the Policy and the implementation of the Action Plan.

Each Higher Education Institution should facilitate student engagement with the collection of national level data on drug use in HEIs.

Introduction

On the 24th June 2019 the Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D convened a meeting in the in the Writers Museum on Parnell Street in Dublin. This initiative was prompted by some recent tragic deaths among third level students following drug use and meetings that the Minister had with families affected by these tragedies. The Minister sought the views from a range of academics, practitioners and experts in education, healthcare and law enforcement on the issue of drug use in Irish Higher Education. Amongst the contributors were:

- Minister Catherine Byrne TD, Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy
- Dr Suzi Lyons, National Research Board
- Kate O Flaherty, Head of Health and Wellbeing Department of Health
- John Hannon and Jimmy McGovern, National University of Ireland Galway
- Dr Michael Byrne, Head of Student Health University College Cork

Following this meeting, the Minister initiated a number of activities to further understand and develop responses to the issues discussed. Amongst these was the establishment of an interagency Rapid Response Group (RRG) with the goal of drafting a multi-component Action-Plan, consistent with national strategy.

The RRG was chaired by Dr Andrew Power, Registrar of IADT and the lead was Dr Michael Byrne, Head of Student Health Department, UCC. The group met on the 25th of September to begin its work and this report is the outcome of its deliberations.

Dr Andrew Power

18 November 2019

Societal Context

Illicit drug use among young adults remains a major public health threat in Europe, with one quarter of 18-21 year olds and 41% of 21-24 year olds reporting illicit drug use in their lifetime.¹ Globally, cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug with an estimated 181.8 million people aged 15-64 years using cannabis for non-medical reasons.² Rates of current illicit drug use are highest among 18-25 year-olds, with 23% reporting current use in 2016.^{3,4} A significant proportion of this age group will spend a number of years in third-level education, in colleges and universities.⁵ For many, this is the time when they may come into contact with drugs for the first time. Annual prevalence of drug use in US third-level students has grown gradually from 34% in 2006, to 43% in 2018.⁶ Annual use of illicit drugs other than cannabis are reported by 18% of third-level students,⁷ and just under a quarter report current use of any illicit drug.^{8,9} This population are particularly under-researched,¹⁰ as much of the research focuses on second-level populations,¹¹ or is European and US based. Of the available Irish research, there are considerable variations in reported rates of drug use.

In 2002 and 2003, Irish third level institutions took part in the first national lifestyle study (CLAN) among undergraduate full-time students.¹² It found that cannabis was the most common illegal drug used by students in Ireland with over a third (37%) reporting that they had used it in the past 12 months and one in five (20%) had used cannabis in the past 30 days.¹³ A higher number of male students reported using cannabis both in the last year (45%) and in the last 30 days (30%) in comparison with female students. The My World survey conducted in 2012 reported that young adults (the majority of which were third-level students) indicated high levels of substance use, with 45% reporting that they had used cannabis.¹⁴

A limited student survey, completed by 2,701 students in 2014 in various HEIs around Ireland reported that 82% of respondents sampled had used illegal drugs.¹⁵ Cannabis was the most popular drug with 55% of students reporting experimentation, while 26% reported having tried ecstasy and 9% of students had tried hallucinogens.¹⁶ The results of this student survey appeared to show a sharp increase in illicit drug use from that found in the previous decade. Sample size was relatively low and the planned national Drug Use in Higher Education in Ireland survey being run by the *My Understanding of Substance-use Experiences* (MiUSE) project team in University College Cork, led by Dr Michael Byrne, supported by Minister Mary Mitchell-O'Connor and the Department of Education and Skills, intends to give a more comprehensive picture.

International research, comparing third-level students with their non-student peers, has generally found that drug use is lower in student populations.^{17, 18} However, there are some notable

differences; in particular, third-level students have the highest rate of amphetamine use, likely as a means to improve academic performance,¹⁹ and have been found to be four-times more likely than non-students to have used ketamine.²⁰

The provision of Higher Education takes place within a societal context which is changing and evolving. The surveys referenced above provide a picture of the landscape in which students and educators are operating. The current picture of Higher Education is explored in the next section but the focus of this report of the Rapid Response Group has been to try and build a framework of actions which can both form an appropriate policy framework and make apposite contribution to the Institutional culture of our Higher Education Institutions. It is important to acknowledge that much is outside of the control of HEIs, both in terms of evolving societal norms and individual responsibilities. Students, their families, partners and social groups all play a role in an individual's attitude to drugs and the support available to them. Nevertheless, our HEIs play an important role in the welfare of our students, setting the standards, responding to their needs and building a positive culture.

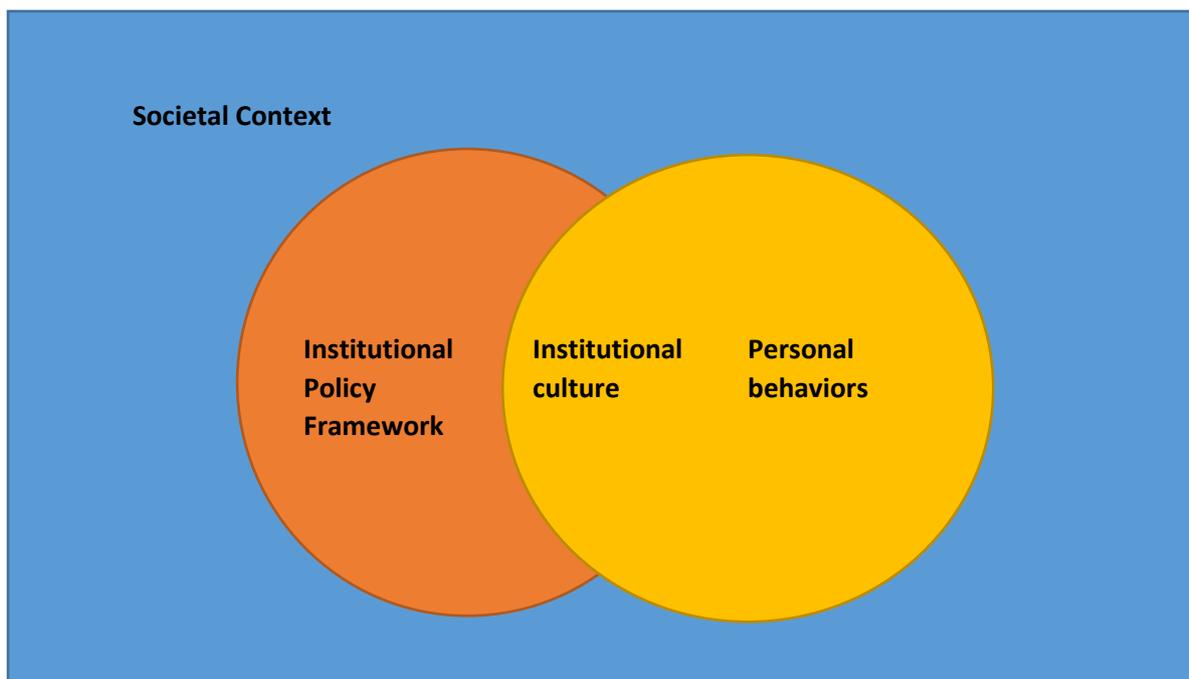


Figure 1: Framework for understanding HEI role

The National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2017-2025 – Reducing Harm and Supporting Recovery

The National Strategy was published in July 2017 and represents a framework for dealing with the issues of Drug and Alcohol use in Ireland. In introducing the strategy, the Taoiseach noted that Ireland has a problem with substance misuse. Rates of drug use in Ireland have risen significantly over the last decade with the greatest increase seen among young people. ‘Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery’ is a whole of government approach that emphasises a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland. The strategy highlights the need to reduce the harms associated with substance use along with combating underlying reasons for the demand for drugs. The importance of a harm reduction response becomes clear from the National Drugs-Related Deaths Index 2004 to 2016, which confirmed a total of 8,207 drug-related deaths over the thirteen year period.

Minister Catherine Byrne, Minister of State for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy, stated that ‘The importance of high quality drug and alcohol education is recognised in the strategy, which recommends that substance use education should be provided alongside wellbeing programmes, information campaigns and other preventative measures. Together these initiative, if effectively delivered, give young people the tools to make informed choices about substance use and encourage them to embrace positive lifestyle changes, which can improve their health and wellbeing’.

This strategy is the third national drug strategy since 2001 and as well as advocating for the harm reduction approach also placed a greater emphasis on supporting a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland.

The vision for the strategy is for a ‘Healthier and safer Ireland, where public health and safety is protected and the harms caused to individuals, families and communities by substance misuse are reduced and every person affected by substance misuse is empowered to improve their health and wellbeing and quality of life’. To realise the vision, there are five strategic goals;

- Promote and protect health and wellbeing
- Minimise the harms caused by the use and misuse of substances and promote rehabilitation and recovery.
- Address the harms of drug markets and reduce access to drugs for harmful use.
- Support participation of individuals, families and communities.
- Develop sound and comprehensive evidence-informed policies and actions.

One of the issues highlighted in the strategy is the fact that over the past decade, new patterns of drug use and related harms have emerged. This includes increased use of cannabis and ecstasy (MDMA) particularly among young people. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) has noted that the potency of Tetrahyrdocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive component of cannabis, in herbal cannabis and cannabis rein has almost doubled in the last 10 years. Ecstasy strength has increased significantly across Europe with the strength of MDMA in ecstasy tablets at a ten year high (European Drug Report 2019). This increase in potency of both cannabis and ecstasy is also associated with more health related harms from both a physical and particularly a psychological perspective.

National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol, and the Northern Ireland Public Health Information and Research Branch, commission a survey of the general population to estimate the

number of people in Ireland who use drugs and alcohol. The most recent prevalence figures (2014/15) for cannabis use in Ireland show that lifetime use in adults aged 15-64 years is 27.9% with 7.7% having used in the last year and 4.4% in the last month.²¹ Rates of use are highest among young adults aged 15-34 years and although lifetime prevalence in this group is relatively unchanged since the previous national survey in 2010/11 at 33.5%, last year use has significantly increased (13.8% up from 10.3%) and last month use has almost doubled (8.1%, up from 4.5% in 2010/11).

In relation to ecstasy use among young people aged 15-34 years the prevalence survey of 2014/15 identified that 4.4% had used in the last year. This was a significant increase in use from the 2010/11 survey when only 0.9% showed last year use. Data from the EMCDDA shows that Ireland is second only to the Netherlands in relation to MDMA use in this age group across Europe. Since 2004 and up to 2016, which is the most recent year that data is available for, there have been 125 deaths reported by the National Drug Related Deaths Index (NDRDI) where MDMA was implicated.

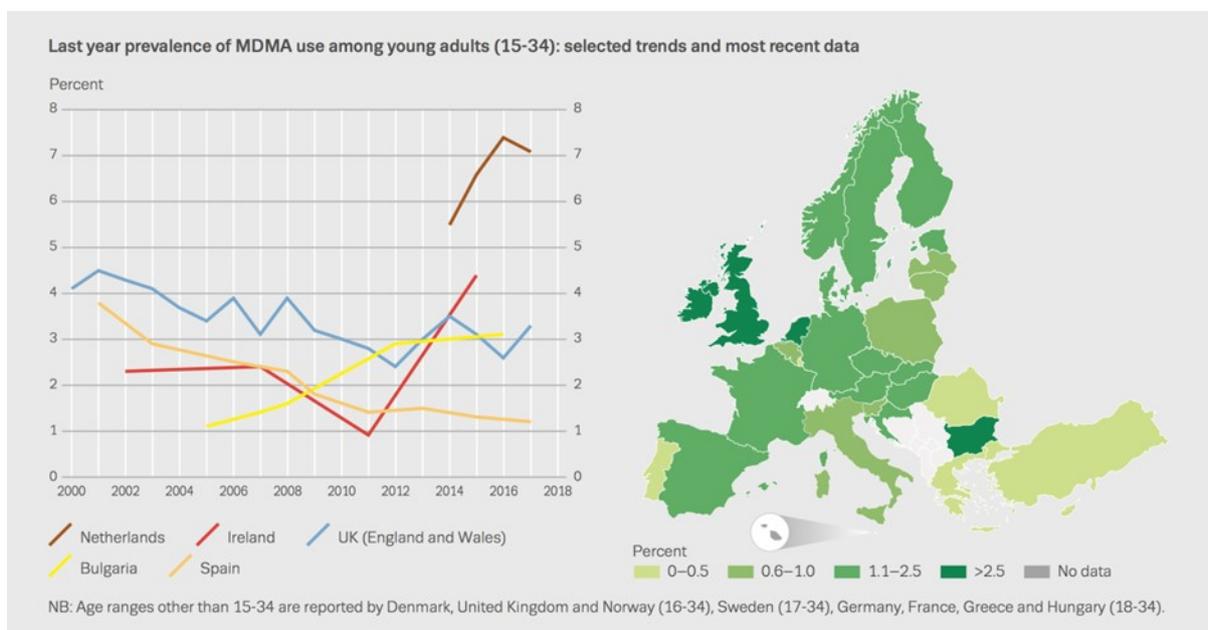


Figure 2 MDMA use among young people aged 15-34 across Europe

All drugs are dangerous each one exposing the user to several physical and psychological risks. Most drugs are physically addictive and can lead to dependence. The greater independence of young people attending colleges and the tendency to increased alcohol and drug use in this age group make colleges an important setting for harm reduction and for referral of those developing problems to specialist services.²² Illicit drug use is highest among those aged 18-25²³. In a recent systematic review, a team of researchers from UCC identified the increasing use of illicit drugs amongst students in higher institutions.²⁴ Nevertheless, Higher-level institutions often struggle to find effective and salient strategies to tackle alcohol and other drug use. Initiatives that focus solely on abstinence and prohibition have fallen short in achieving, creating and sustaining, healthy campus environments.²⁵ Although in their infancy initiatives incorporating harm reduction measures have been more successful. The harm reduction approach recognises an enduring level of drug use in society is inevitable, thus defining its objective as reducing the adverse consequences of drug use experienced by the user and others.²⁶ Harm reduction is recognised within national²⁷ and international²⁸ policy as best practice, thus any response to drug use in Higher Education Institutions should include harm reduction policies and practice.

The National Strategy does identify third level students as requiring interventions and mentions the need for harm reduction and brief advice tools which can signpost to locally based supports. Examples of targeted initiatives for students were highlighted and included 'What's in the Pill' and Spunout's targeted online advertising. The strategy notes the importance of online awareness campaigns such as those developed by drugs.ie in highlighting the risks associated with psychoactive substance use. The strategy also has an action to support evidence informed practice and service provision. To this end, in relation to HEIs it recommends developing collaborative relationships with third level institutions in the area of drugs and alcohol so as to further government funded research priorities.

Adverse consequences of drug use

Illicit drug use can have significant consequences for students, particularly if it begins early in their time in Higher Education.²⁹ These include; negative impacts on academic outcomes,^{30,31} increase in dropout rates,^{32,33} delayed graduation,³⁴ expulsion or suspension,³⁵ failure to attain a degree,³⁶ and potential impacts on career trajectories.³⁷ Students have reported missing classes and receiving a lower grade as a result of their illicit drug use.³⁸ Further illicit drug use can cause a myriad of personal and societal harms including; overdose, loss of life, engaging in risky sexual behaviours,³⁹ being aggressive or engaging in violent behaviour,⁴⁰ causing panic attacks, insomnia and nausea,⁴¹ causing seizures, memory loss, and unconsciousness.⁴² Longer term effects include weight loss, teeth problems, and impact on sleep quality.⁴³ Illicit drug use can also have a profound impact on mental health⁴⁴ and has been linked to an increased risk of depressive symptoms, deliberate self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicidal attempts.⁴⁵ USI Mental health report on third level students reported that students are experiencing extremely severe levels of anxiety (38.4%), depression (29.9%) and stress (17.3%).⁴⁶ Illicit drug use can have a damaging impact on relationships and occupations,⁴⁷ negatively affect financial situations,⁴⁸ and lead to legal problems,⁴⁹ with a criminal record limiting future travel and career prospects.⁵⁰

Current Higher Education Landscape

The primary responsibilities of our HEIs, lie in the areas of knowledge creation and dissemination through Research, Teaching and Learning. The HEIs also have a responsibility to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of students in order to ensure that the students can maximise the benefits accruing to them from the knowledge acquired through this learning and research. An emerging threat to the success of our students is the harm experienced by some students through the use of illicit drugs and in some cases misuse of prescription drugs. HEIs can assist in addressing this emerging hazard by implementing actions that have the potential to reduce the number of students who decide to use drugs in the first place. Other actions implemented may also have the potential to reduce the harm experienced by those students who have chosen to use drugs.

Drug use is a societal issue and is therefore likely to occur in all HEIs. However, there is a paucity of reliable data as to the prevalence of drug use with little evidence as to reasons for non-use, the motivations for use, as well as the levels of harms experienced by students who do decide to take drugs. Where drug use is self-reported by the student, the range of supports available in most HEIs includes medical support, counselling support, students union welfare officers, specialist referrals, advice from the HSE (including services in local and regional drug and alcohol task forces) and An Garda Síochána. The USI and many local Students Unions engage in awareness activities around substance use and campaigns focussing on harm-reduction approach to the issue.

Whilst many HEIs have developed policies and implemented action plans in relation to alcohol use, there has been limited engagement by HEIs with the issue of drug use. The level of drug use and addiction reported as the reason for approaching counselling services and health units vary, with reported levels highest in larger HEIs and in larger urban areas. Data regarding the level of use of recreational drugs and addictive drugs is often anecdotal, indicating that drugs are readily available if the student 'asks around'. The availability of drugs on campus and in student accommodation settings is also difficult to quantify. Substance use by students often comes to light when it manifests as problematic socially, medically or in academic performance.

Some HEIs engage in awareness raising activities on the issue of drug use and the broad focus of action is on preventing use and supporting students who choose not to take drugs. Alcoholic Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous and SMART recovery meetings have been held on and off campus for students. A number of the Task Forces work closely with student bodies to provide information about drugs and accessing local services on campus. Supporting positive choices for students is the predominant focus of HEI policies on drugs and alcohol. Up to now, HEIs may have been reluctant to engage with a harm reduction approach to the issue of drug use out of concern that this approach might be seen as endorsing drug use or even that it might undermine the attempts to promote a do not use approach. However, there is growing concern amongst the student-body and HEI professionals as to the impact of drug-use on students and the call to action by the Minister of State with special responsibility for Higher Education is timely and may require a widening of the approach in HEIs on the issue of drug use among students

Student services in HEIs

HEIs provide a range of wellbeing support services and students experiencing adverse consequences of drug use may come to the attention of or seek help from any of these services, including Accommodation Services, Disability Support Services, Chaplaincy, Students' Union Welfare Officers, as well as healthcare professional services such as Student Health and Student Counselling.

The increasing workload facing student support services both in terms of the complexity of the issues presenting as well as an increase in the number of individual students seeking support means meeting the challenge of identifying and responding to students experiencing harms from drug-use will be difficult. Appendix 5 outlines the range of levels of current provision of counselling services in HEIs in Ireland and summarises the possible consequences for HEIs and for students of any worsening in the ratio of the no.of counsellors to the number of students in an institution. The challenge to provide an on campus addiction-counsellor or addiction counselling service in this context is clearly very challenging indeed.

The PCHEI is the representative body of Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland. All PCHEI Irish Higher Education Institutes (HEI's) operate embedded Student Counselling Services (SCSs) These services:

- Provide psychological assessments and interventions to at-risk and distressed students
- Improve student retention and academic progression
- Enable students best attain their academic goals
- Enhance student learning outcomes of personal development and resilience skills
- Enhance the student experience and increase student engagement

- Provide psychological expertise and advice to HEI frontline staff in managing critical incidents and complex cross service student mental health presentations.

The International Association of Counselling Services (2010) Concluded that; *“Every effort should be made to maintain minimum staffing ratios in the range of one Full Time Equivalent (FTE) professional staff member (excluding trainees) to every 1,000 to 1,500 students”*

The student counsellor to student ratio in Ireland in 2017/18 was 1: 2600 students and was as low as 1: 6000 in some HEIs. At current levels, resources are inadequate to meet students' needs. Long waiting lists, in excess of 300 students in some HEIs, are now normal during the academic year. The consequences of neglecting this benchmark are:

- Increased liability risks to HEI's from failure to respond promptly to students at-risk due to increased waiting lists
- Difficulty providing services to students experiencing increasingly more severe psychological issues
- Decreased support for the academic success of students, increased drop-out
- Counselling services will be less available to help support the campus community (e.g., to train faculty and staff, provide preventive outreaches to student groups, serve on committees, and provide consultations for faculty, staff, and administrators who are trying to handle difficult student situations)

Given the current demand on resources, it is essential that the provision of adequate counsellors, the upskilling of existing counsellors, or additional training for on-campus or embedded Student Health or Psychiatry services result in a net addition to the existing student counselling resources.

The Student Perspective

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is a national representative body for third level students across the island of Ireland. Throughout its history, USI has worked hard in the pursuit of student rights in all areas of the student experience.

The current realities of students are that they are facing the high fees, a student accommodation crisis in relation to both supply and cost and, according to recent USI research, a large amount of students are struggling with mental health issues. Education at both second and third level is crucial in terms of informing students about drugs.

USI's perspective is that a significant number of students are already taking drugs for various different reasons and believe that this experience should be as safe as possible. USI are strongly in favour of a harm reduction approach and messaging for students when it comes to education around using drugs.

USI and HSE have an extremely important partnership on drug harm reduction campaigns which can all be found on the drugs.ie website. USI and Students' Unions (SU) have been using the harm reduction messaging on campuses created by the HSE and USI for a number of years. Locally SUs have been developing their own resources, such as support cards for example, in partnership with experts such as the HSE.

Student Unions have been engaged with harm reduction messaging on campuses. Student Unions work with institutions on campaigns or any issues that may arise in relation to substance use on campus but many colleges are not taking a proactive approach to this. Few institutions have substance use policies that include drugs in a comprehensive way.

There are varying structures of how clubs and societies exist in HEIs with the responsibility lying with the Students Unions to run them in some cases and the HEI in others. This needs to be considered as an area where interventions could occur due the time students spend involved in these as part of their student experience and the events/activities that they run. Some HEIs or Student Union societies also have a chapter of the Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) as a society.

Recommendations - Action points

The Rapid Response Group have reviewed a suite of action points informed by and consistent with the following;

- Existing legislation regarding the use and misuse of drugs.
- The National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2017-2025 – Reducing Harm and Supporting Recovery.
- The National Healthy Campus Charter and Framework.
- The learnings from earlier work carried out at 3rd level to tackle drug and alcohol related harm, including REACT (Reacting to Excessive Alcohol Consumption in Third-level).
- The input and expertise of the diverse members of the Rapid Response Group.

The RRG acknowledge that not all of the action points listed below will apply to all Institutions. For example, some refer to campus accommodation, which is not a factor in some HEIs. It is also acknowledged that the scale of Institutions and the resources available vary significantly amongst HEIs. Finally, the suite of recommended Action Points is proposed as being complementary, and in addition to, existing actions and activities rolled out by other agencies such as the HSE and the Department of Health and Children. For example, in the National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy specific reference is made to the role of the Department of Health in “Developing collaborative relationships with third level institutions in the area of drugs and alcohol so as to further government funded research priorities” (section 5.1.46 d).

‘The development of IT/Web based drug education, harm reduction and brief advice tools targeted at third level students which have a component signposting to locally available supports, will be a key element of the prevention strategy’ (pages 29,30).

The following Action Points are recommended and should be considered as a suit of possible actions from which our Higher Educational Institutions can select the range of actions most appropriate for their own institution.

The Action Points are divided into four key areas.

- Institutional Leadership
- Student Engagement
- Community Engagement
- Service Provision

Institutional leadership and student engagement are of course vital to addressing the problem. Supporting these two principal pillars are the core activities of community engagement and service provision. There are sixteen suggesting actions divided amongst these four headings. The RRG have prioritised four Leading Action points which are set out in the conclusion to this report.

Institutional Leadership

Institutional Leadership is often described as the collective ability of a leadership team to detect and cope with changes in the external environment by maintaining the primary goals of the organisation. Leadership in the higher education context often about our ability to adapt in a complex societal, academic, legislative and policy environment whilst focusing on the ambitions and welfare of our students. The six actions listed below will help ensure Institutions are alive to the changing environment and focused on the needs of our students.

The development of a Drug and Alcohol policy specific to the HEI.

This Policy to be developed in collaboration with their local Students' Union, to be consistent with and informed by the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy of a health led approach including harm reduction to the issue of drug and alcohol use and the Framework for the Development of a College Alcohol Policy.⁵¹

The development and implementation of a local, HEI specific, Drug and Alcohol Action Plan.

This Action Plan to be developed in collaboration with their local Students' Union and to contain a range of specific action points drawn from each of four key areas; Institutional Leadership, Student Engagement, Community Engagement, and Service Provision. The specific actions to include those that focus on Education, Prevention and Harm Reduction and the Action Plan to be tailored according to each local institution needs, resources and local priorities. The Action Plan should be consistent with current legislation and guided by National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery' and local expertise.

The HEI completes a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of its own Drugs and Alcohol Action Plan at least once every 3 years

The HEI devises and completes an evaluation strategy to monitor the effectiveness of the Drugs and Alcohol Action Plan at least once every 3 years. Interim reviews can be undertaken at earlier intervals as well.

Provide drug, substance, alcohol and tobacco-free housing and alcohol-free social spaces

Develop a contract of occupancy for student tenants in institution-owned student accommodation

Allocate space on the HEI campus for support groups working with those struggling with drug and alcohol abuse.

For example, this might include peer-led abstinence based recovery services such as HSE SMART Recovery or Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

Student Engagement

Students are the key stakeholder in the higher education community. Student participation is therefore key in all aspects of our institutions. The student, institution, and wider community benefit when students are actively engaged in institutional decision-making. The investment of time, effort and resources by students and the HEI is critical to optimising the student experience and the work of the institution. The four actions below are aimed and supporting this engagement.

Participation in, and facilitation of, the collection of national level data on drug use in HEIs.

The institution to facilitate the MiUSE survey team in collecting data using a standardised survey instrument that will provide individual and HEI anonymised data at a sector level to reveal motivations and prevalence of use and non-use of drugs, adverse consequences experienced, motivations, readiness and capacity to change

The institution to provide and actively promote to students an on-line educational, screening and brief intervention tool.

All students to be provided with access to an on-line educational and brief intervention tool that addresses the issue of drug use. The tool will provide evidence-based educational material and actively supports mindful choices not to take drugs. For those students already engaged in drug-taking, the tool should assist individuals to identify consequences for themselves and others of their drug-taking. The tool should provide personalised feedback to the students and assist individuals to develop personalised plans to reduce harm and change their drug-taking behaviour. The tool should include signposting to institution and local addiction, mental health and other support services.

Safety issues in the context of intoxicants such as drugs and alcohol must be considered while planning all large-scale students' events

An item relating to drugs and alcohol and any related safety issues such as idiosyncratic reactions or overheating should be discussed and appear on the agenda of all SU, Student Society and Student Club events with event management plans naming intoxication as a hazard that needs to be considered at such events e.g. Formal Balls Gigs, RAG weeks, etc. Organisers should actively seek opportunities to promote non-alcohol/substance events as well as promoting harm reduction initiatives and have guidelines for what to do in the event of an emergency and utilise HSE campaign resources aimed at events.

Develop and implement a Student Community Support system

Develop and implement a Student Community Support system for key "student-weeks" (e.g. R&G Week, Freshers Week, etc.) The SCS aims to support students who are out and about at night during weeks of peak social activity. Student Unions should be encouraged to share their messages through their social media channels and on campus in advance of student-led events or festivals. By reaching students with HSE messages before events, it supports them to make informed decisions on how they could reduce the harms associated with use.

Community Engagement

Our Institutes of Higher Education play an important role in the communities in which they are located. Including the community in the life of the institute is important in building an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Below are two suggesting actions that HEIs are encouraged to develop as their own particular location and environment dictate.

Hold an annual meeting with local stakeholders

Hold a minimum of one meeting annually with local stakeholders (e.g. local Gardaí, residents, local businesses, etc.) as a forum to discuss concerns and to consider suggestions and respond to these concerns.

Partnerships developed with relevant local community groups

Partnerships developed with relevant local community groups (e.g. local council, healthy cities committee, etc. local and regional drugs and alcohol task forces).

Service Provision

Providing adequate services and resources to support the evolving roles of our HEIs in the developmental as well as academic life of our student communities is critical. Below are a number of recommended actions to guide Institutions in addressing the issue of drug and alcohol use amongst the student community.

The assigning of a Senior Officer of the HEI, responsibility for leading the development of the Policy and implementing the Action Plan.

A senior officer of each HEI to be identified as responsible for leading and implementing the policy and plan to ensure that high-level commitment of the institution is secured. The officer to have the authority, credibility and expertise to help lead and facilitate change in this challenging area.

Drugs and Alcohol counselling services to be available to students in the HEI

Additional resources to be made available to Student Counselling and Student Health Services in order to provide an accessible addiction counselling and health service to the student body, to target drug related harms. The HSE services to collaborate where appropriate with state and voluntary sector services that may be available in the community.

Develop a visible and accessible referral pathway to a range of internal and external addiction assessment and treatment services for students

Develop a visible and accessible referral pathway to a range of internal and external addiction support services for students.

Provide interventions that target higher risk groups

The HEI to develop interventions that are specifically targeted at higher risk groups. This is important given the evidence that riskier drug-taking practices can occur in vulnerable individuals or individuals from minority groups or communities

Provide Training for HEI staff and students in how to deliver Brief Intervention and Advice

Ensure key individuals in the institution are able to deliver Brief Intervention and advice around drugs and alcohol misuse and have a clear understanding of the internal and external referral pathways to other services. These key individuals should be identified by each institution but may include staff mentors, peers, and welfare services, as well as the medical and counselling services. Institutions are encouraged to see these key staff as broader than the medical and counselling services and to include for example course coordinators, student representatives and/or years heads as appropriate.

Conclusion

The Rapid Response Group advises the Minister that each Higher Education Institution undertake the following four Leading Actions drawn from the more comprehensive list in the proceeding section.

LEADING ACTION POINTS		
	LEADING ACTION POINT	DESCRIPTION/COMMENT
1.	The development of a Drug and Alcohol policy specific to the HEI.	This policy to be developed in consultation with the local Students Union, to be consistent with and informed by the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery', and the Framework for the Development of an Alcohol Policy.
2.	The development and implementation of a local, HEI specific, Drug and Alcohol Action Plan.	This action plan to be developed in consultation with the local Student's Union and to contain a range of specific action points drawn from each of four key areas, Student Engagement, Institutional Leadership, Community Engagement and Service Provision. The specific action points will focus on Education, Prevention and Harm Reduction and the individual Action Plan to be tailored by each institution selecting Action Points according to each local institution's needs, resources and local priorities.
3.	The assigning of a Senior Officer of the HEI, responsibility for leading the development of the Policy and implementing the Action Plan.	A Senior Officer of each institution to be identified as responsible for leading and implementing the Policy and Action Plan to ensure that high-level commitment of the institution is secured. The Officer to have the authority, credibility and expertise to help lead and facilitate change in this challenging area.
4.	Participation in, and facilitation of, the collection of national level data on drug use in HEIs.	The institution to facilitate the MiUSE survey team in collecting data using a standardised survey instrument that will provide aggregated data at sector level, anonymised at individual and HEI level. These data will reveal motivations and prevalence of use and non-use of Drugs, adverse consequences experienced, and individual readiness and capacity to change drug-taking behaviour.

Appendix 1 - RRG members

Dr Andrew Power (Chair)	The Institute of Art Design and Technology (IADT)
Dr Michael Byrne (Lead)	UCC Head of Student Health Service
Dr Eamon Keenan	National Clinical Lead-Addiction Services
Nicki Killeen	Development Worker, National Social Inclusion Office, HSE
Paul Moriarty	Director of Student Experience UCC/Chair Student Affairs Ireland
Mai Fanning	President of the National Parents Council Post Primary
John Hannon	NUI Galway
Jimmy McGovern	NUI Galway
Fr Ben Hughes	NUI Galway (Chaplaincy)
Roisin O' Connell	The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
Lia O'Sullivan	Head of Communications, Irish Universities Association (IUA)
Róisín O'Donovan	USI Vice President Welfare Officer
Assistant Commissioner John O'Driscoll	Special Crime Operations
Assistant Commissioner Orla McPartlin	Community Engagement and Public Safety
Superintendent Kevin Daly	
Dr Jo-Hanna Ivers	Assistant Professor in Addiction TCD
Professor Mary Cannon	Psychiatrist, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) - Youth Mental Health Taskforce
Terry Twomey	LIT VP Academic Affairs & Registrar
Meabh McGuinness	Education Project Manager, HSE
Gertie Raftery	Chairperson PCHEI,
Laura Devlin	Administrator

Appendix 2 - Examples of current initiatives

Over the past 30 years, third level colleges have focused their attention on reducing the harm experienced by students through their use of alcohol. The focus has been on development of alcohol policies and programmes such as the REACT programme implementing a range of action points that target alcohol related harm. To date no comparable sector-wide approach has been implemented relating to drug use and the related harm. The actions contained within this report and recommended by the Rapid Response Group seek to address this important issue and to do so in the unique setting and context that exists in the higher education sector in Ireland. There is however, a wide range of examples of good practice throughout the Irish HEI sector and a number of examples are given below.

The Healthy Campus initiative

A Healthy Campus initiative is being developed under the cross-Government Healthy Ireland agenda. The forthcoming HEI Healthy Campus Charter and Framework for Ireland aims to guide and inspire action on health promotion and improvement in third level education. The framework will provide institutions with guidance on how to approach health promotion in line with the international best practice set out in the Okanagan Charter. The Healthy Campus Charter and Framework were co-created by the Department of Health, HSE and HEIs and supports Healthy Ireland vision 'where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone's responsibility.' The Charter and Framework will be published shortly and will be available online.

Current messaging in HEIs around substance use is on the soft end of the spectrum compared to some other jurisdictions, though substance use policy remains on the harder side. The Regional Drugs and Alcohol Awareness Initiative has also proved a valuable support to HEIs.

REACT

REACT is the awards and accreditation scheme for Higher Institutions in Ireland that implement an action plan that seeks to respond to the issue of excessive consumption of alcohol amongst third level students. In 2015, 15 of Ireland's 26 Higher Education Institutions committed to pursuing the REACT award and commenced on the journey to implement a suite of evidenced-based actions in their own institution. These specific actions included 8 actions which were mandatorily required to qualify the institution for the REACT award as well as a wider suite of 16 optional action points from which each institution selected action points which suited their setting and resources. In August 2019 at the inaugural awards ceremony 5 Universities, 4 Institutes of Technology and 1 College of Education were granted the REACT award.

Campus Watch

Campus Watch is similar to a residential Neighbourhood Watch scheme in that it is a crime prevention and community safety programme. It operates as a partnership between An Garda Síochána and the Campus occupants. It works on the basis that every member of Campus can help to improve the quality of life on site by keeping a look out for students, staff and visitors, and reporting suspicious activities to the Gardaí. An Garda Síochána in partnership with a number of student representative bodies have developed a 20 page information booklet which is available via

the following link - <https://www.garda.ie/en/crime-prevention/crime-prevention/campus-watch/campus-watch.html>

This booklet provides the reader with key information in relation to Drug and Alcohol Awareness as well as a number of pertinent topics including Personal Safety, Security of Accommodation and Vehicles, Road Safety, Victims of Crime, Sexual Crime, Antisocial Behaviour, Age Card, Money Laundering, Cyber Crime and Respect for Diversity.

As of October 2019 the Campus Watch booklet is available in the 10 most spoken languages on Campus, as per the HEA figures 2017/2018, and acts as a signpost for the reader as to where more detail information is available.

[HSE/Drugs.ie Harm Reduction Campaigns](#)

Drugs.ie is Ireland's national drug information and support website that provides a comprehensive range of information and supports related to substance use. It is managed by the HSE National Social Inclusion Office. Drugs.ie provides an A-Z of different types of drugs and their effects, a wide range of support resources and several harm-reduction campaign resources. The site also houses the National Directory of Drug and Alcohol Services, as well as an interactive drug self-assessment and brief intervention resource the DUDIT. This resource enables individuals over the age of eighteen to complete an online test to identify harmful drug use. On completing the test, the user receives personalised video feedback based on their specific responses, with suggestions on what to do to change any risks relating to drug use.

Since 2015, Drugs.ie have responded to emerging drug trends and new user groups by creating campaign resources and social media content to raise awareness of the risks associated with use and how to reduce the harms. The campaigns aim to engage with cohorts, such as students, that may never present to traditional addiction services in Ireland.

A number of Drugs.ie campaigns have targeted third-level students. The HSE work in collaboration with USI and other student bodies to ensure they are actively involved in the development and design of all resources aimed at students.

[Safer Student Nights Campaign 2019](#)

In response to the use of club drugs at student events, the HSE partnered with the Union of Students in Ireland to launch a new campaign aimed at promoting harm reduction information in advance of and at student events.

The 'Safer Student Nights' campaign highlights the risks that third level students take when using club drugs such as MDMA, cocaine and ketamine. This campaign highlights the dangers of poly drug use and provides information, social media and a bespoke social media partner pack for Student Unions. As well as reaching students online, the HSE provided 3 harm reduction stalls ahead of student events in Dublin as part of this campaign.

Examples of Drugs.ie campaigns aimed at third-level students;

- What's in the pill (2015)
- What's in the powder (2016)

- Do you know what you are taking? MDMA, Ketamine, Mephedrone, Synthetic Cannabinoids (2016, 2017)
- Safer Student Nights (2019)

Campaign resources can be downloaded from [Drugs.ie/campaigns](https://www.drugs.ie/campaigns).

USI publications

There are some examples of Students' Unions providing support cards and information alongside the selling of tickets to events and balls. One such example is TUDSU. Some SUs also work with venues they link with to have information at the events themselves. UCCSU have created a fold out support card for students the last two years covering harm reduction when using drugs and harm reduction messaging on medical care.

NCADSU are producing their own leaflets, with campus culture friendly language and design, in partnership with the HSE. They have also called on the institution to do workshops on drugs alongside consent classes.

Examples of initiatives in individual HEIs

Bystander training

Seas Suas is a bystander intervention training programme ran by the Chaplaincy Centre in NUI Galway. The programme is aimed at promoting positive mental health and well-being, learning intervention skills, and adopting a proactive attitude in supporting oneself and others. Over a four week period (one evening per week), Seas Suas leads 250 students in a series of interactive lectures from a range of organisations covering topics on mental health, suicide, alcohol and drugs use, sexual consent, and internet safety. Organisations that have delivered sessions include: The Samaritans, The Western Region Drug & Alcohol Task Force, The National Office for Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Ireland, NUI Galway School of Psychology, and the NUI Galway Insight Centre for Data Analytics.

Feedback from participants indicates towards Seas Suas as a catalyst for further learning, engagement and specialisation (e.g. ASIST, SAOR, volunteering initiatives, etc.). More significantly, participants have identified the Seas Suas Programme as being an empowering factor in initiating interventions with peers and strangers in private and public settings, where they were concerned about the welfare of the individual. Of these occurrences, problematic alcohol and drug use among peers was a matter which students cited as a motive to embark upon the training programme.

Seas Suas began with 20 students as a pilot programme in the 2014/15 academic year. The programme has continued to evolve in both content and demand, and now sees 500 students successfully complete the programme in the academic year.

Recent Institutional policy documents

DCU created a Drugs Policy for the institution last year. They involved many stakeholders in this discussion including the Students' Union and the DCU SSDP chapter. IT Tralee also has a standalone policy on drugs.

Cork Institute of Technology

CIT distributes information to students through the Students' Union Fresher's Handbook, which provides first year students with some key information/warnings in relation to drug use and addiction. Similar information and important links are also available on the Students' Union website under the welfare section. During the first week of the first semester the SU organise a 'Be Safe Campaign'. The HSE Drugs and Alcohol Task Force and the Gardaí are invited on campus to host stands providing students with information around their personal safety, drug use and wellbeing. The SU also run a 'Positive Mind and Body Campaign' and drug usage and harm are key features of this campaign. Typical organisations invited to participate in this week include the HSE Drugs and Alcohol Task Force, addiction services and CIT Medical Unit. A regular article in the Students' Union magazine, entitled 'My Story Matters', is based on true life cases and addiction is a frequent theme of these articles.

Sligo Institute of Technology

Over the past three years IT Sligo together with the Students Union have implemented a variety of programmes and initiatives to tackle the ongoing issue of excessive alcohol and drug use among students. These include: an annual Drug & Alcohol Awareness programme delivered before RAG Week each year; "Campus Watch", which is carried by the SU during busy social events throughout the year; and an emergency number is shared with students if they require a lift or feel vulnerable. The students and staff of IT Sligo were recognised nationally at a recent REACT award ceremony in Dublin for their efforts to reduce harm experienced by students from excess use of alcohol.

Letterkenny Institute of Technology

LYIT has worked with community stakeholders to ensure engagement and leadership on the issue of reducing alcohol harm among the student population. Work in 2017 led to the development of a REACT initiative with support from the Alcohol Forum. A steering committee was formed comprising the Students Union, Gardai, an elected representative, student services and the Alcohol Forum and this group worked on a range of actions to achieve accreditation which was granted in August 2019.

Athlone Institute of Technology

There are strong links between AIT SU and local stakeholders such as the Ana Liffey Drug Project and the local liaison guard. They engage regularly with students on the subject of substance use at various times during the academic year using HSE and drugs.ie campaigns and other initiatives through the work of the Healthy Campus. AIT also works closely with the Midland Regional Drug and Alcohol Taskforce (MRDATF) and have a seat on the Westmeath County Stakeholders Action Group

(WCSAG), which comprises of representation from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors and public representatives from County Westmeath.

Appendix 3 – Samples of Policy Documents for reference

USI Mental Health Report 2019

<http://usi.ie/mentalhealthreport/>

HSE Health Promotion Strategic Framework (includes Drug and Alcohol sections)

http://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPSF_HSE.pdf

National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report 2017

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/117520-national-youth-mental-health-task-force-report-2017/?referrer=/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ymhtf-final-report.pdf/>

Institutes/Universities

DCU Drug Policy 2019

https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/policy/187_-_drugs_policy_v1.pdf

Galway/Mayo Institute of Technology 2018-2019

<https://www.gmit.ie/sites/default/files/public/general/docs/7-1-code-student-conduct-2018-2019.pdf>

Institute of Technology Tralee Substance Abuse Policy (revised 2018)

<http://www.ittralee.ie/en/media/QAMANUAL/A13LearningResourcesandStudentSupport/A13.2%20Substance%20Abuse%20Policy.docx>

NUI Galway Drugs Policy 2011

http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_life/student_services/documents/policy_concerning_misuse_of_drugs_by_students.doc

Queen's University Belfast

<https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/AcademicAffairs/GeneralRegulations/Policies/StudentPolicyonAlcoholandDrugs/>

Ulster University

http://ulster.funnelback.co.uk/s/redirect?collection=ulster-web&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ulster.ac.uk%2Fwellbeing%2Fservices%2Fhealth-and-wellbeing%2Falcohol-and-drugs&auth=QwccwgC%2BT60UP9TVvtKd8Yg&profile=_default&rank=3&query=drug+policy

Drug and Alcohol Information Support in Ireland

<https://www.drugs.ie/>

http://www.drugs.ie/multimedia/video/rachaels_story_my_heroin_hell

USI Budget Submissions 2020 (outlines examples of the struggles students are facing in relation to the cost of college amongst other items)

<http://usi.ie/budget2020/>

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