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Conference report - Tackling violence against women and girls on the island of Ireland

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AINSVR



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Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Across the Island of Ireland

A Conference Organised by the All-Ireland Network on Sexual Violence Research (AINSVR)

2nd September 2024

Report prepared by Dr Eithne Dowds, School of law, Queen's University Belfast

Introduction

On Monday 2nd September 2024 Queen's University Belfast (QUB) School of Law hosted the All-Ireland Network on Sexual Violence Research ([AINSVR](#)) Conference on *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Across the Island of Ireland*. While the network itself focuses on sexual violence, this is just one manifestation of the violence experienced by women and girls in our society. Indeed, according to the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Further to this, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) in England and Wales described violence against women and girls as a 'national emergency' and a 'threat to society on the same scale as [terrorism](#)', following the release of [figures](#) revealing that one in 12 women are affected by crimes of stalking, harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence.

In Northern Ireland (NI), [98%](#) of women and [73%](#) of girls who took part in surveys to ascertain the prevalence of violence against women and girls in this jurisdiction reported that they had experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. Since January, [23 women](#) have been murdered in NI, with two of these murders occurring in just one week in August 2024, as well as the [attempted murder](#) of another woman, highlighting the urgency of this issue. In Ireland, violence against women was [reported](#) to have reached 'crisis levels' following the violent death of 11 women in 2022.

The purpose of the AINSVR conference was to provide an opportunity for collaboration and knowledge exchange among Network members in relation to ongoing work to combat violence against women and girls across the island of Ireland, including NI's first [Strategic Framework](#) to End Violence Against Women and Girls. This strategy was first proposed in 2021 and opened for public consultation in 2022. However, following the collapse of the NI government in February 2022 the strategy could not be formally approved and implemented. When the Assembly was restored in February 2024, First Minister Michelle O'Neill confirmed the need for a whole-of-society approach to tackle the '[epidemic](#)' of violence against women and girls in NI. The same week as the AINSVR conference, the Strategic Framework was [approved](#) by the Executive and Ending Violence against Women and Girls was included as one of nine

priority areas in the draft [Programme for Government](#). The Strategic Framework was officially [launched](#) on Monday 16 September 2024.

This report will summarise the topics discussed over the course of the AINSVR conference and draw out key themes, with the aim of providing an important resource to anyone working on or interested in this important topic.

Safe and Free from Fear ¹

A key theme that was identified at the outset of the conference was the desire for women and girls to live in a society safe and free from fear. Statistics from [ARK](#) reflecting on data collected through their annual public attitude surveys, the Young Life and Times (YLT) and the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT), from 2022 show that males feel safer than women in public spaces and that while males experience higher levels of physical violence, females experience significantly more sexual, psychological and online violence. In terms of where the violence occurs, this can be in a variety of places including at home, at a café, public outdoor space, but worryingly the highest percentage of violence is occurring at School for both males and females. Online abuse was also described as a serious concern, with 1 in 2 girls, aged 16, having received an unwanted photo/video at least once in their life-time. A positive finding from the dataset was that a high percentage of respondents in one survey said they would intervene if they witnessed certain forms of abuse, suggesting positive bystander behaviour.

During the session exploring the policy context across the Island of Ireland, attendees heard about government strategies developed to address violence against women and girls including the [draft](#) Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2030 and the (at the time of the conference) draft [Strategic Framework](#) to End Violence Against Women and Girls in NI, and the Irish governments [Third National Strategy](#) on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Although only the Strategic Framework is gender specific, there are important synergies across the strategies and the influence of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the [Istanbul Convention](#)) was evident. Indeed, the NI Strategic Framework and the Republic's Third National Strategy are explicitly structured around the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: Prevention; Protection, Prosecution; and co-ordinated Policies, and it became clear that Prevention is central to all of the strategies.

Within this context, the voice of the child was discussed and the importance of meeting their needs. Throughout the session on prevention and education, attendees caught a glimpse of the insightful and important contributions children and young people made to academic [research projects](#), with one panellist noting that we repeatedly underestimate children and young people's knowledge, understanding and lived experience of these issues. In this respect, the importance of collecting data was also noted, with attention to appropriate methods and the inclusion of young people from the outset, as well as the value of interdisciplinary teams – a single discipline is not going to tackle this issue. Further to this, data collection provides an essential oversight/accountability mechanism whereby the extent to which the prevention pillar in the strategies actually results in reduced incidents can be measured. However, the challenge presented by our evolving definitional frames was also mentioned.

¹ Drawn from title of Ms Julie Wilson's presentation "Safe and free from fear" – How do we Eradicate Domestic and Sexual Abuse?"

Social Context and the Importance of Education

Throughout the conference it was acknowledged that the key to prevention is tackling the problematic social and cultural attitudes and beliefs that create an environment where violence against women and girls can thrive. The [Strategic Framework](#) recognises the Pyramid of Gender Based Violence with criminal offences at the top level, unwanted behaviours at the second level, damaging attitudes and beliefs at the third level, and systemic inequalities and damaging social norms at the bottom level. The levels do not reflect a hierarchy, rather they represent the continuum and interconnectedness of abuse, with those further down the pyramid being much more pervasive and a root cause of violence against women and girls. An example of such damaging attitudes and norms can be found in a [YLT survey](#) finding that almost 1 in 5 young males, aged 16, believe posting jokes or nasty comments of a sexual nature on social media, wolf whistling and shouting at someone in the street are acceptable behaviours.

The failure of relationship and sexuality education was a key theme across the panel on prevention and education, with research showing that young people are continually reporting that what is happening in school is no longer working for them. It was also noted that a whole community approach is needed, as school is not the only place where education occurs. Indeed, an emphasis was placed on meeting people where they are: all communities and all age groups, and in respect of children, the importance of buy-in from parents. Further to this, there was a consensus among speakers and attendees that we cannot tackle violence against women and girls without the involvement and support of men and boys.

The role of the traditional [sex script](#) was discussed, with the male as the sexual initiator and the female as the sexual gatekeeper, reflecting a transactional model of sex and consent. Such a script is harmful to all genders, with a heavy burden placed on females to say ‘no’ and on males to be the domineering force even when they do not want to. It was noted that we have outgrown ‘yes mean yes’ and ‘no means no’ as mantras for consent; not everything is as black and white. In this regard, the complexity of personal and sexual relations was emphasised, as well as a lack of understanding in respect of consent and sexual communication. Attendees heard about findings from research projects where participants expressed that, while they knew what rape was, they did not know what consent was and that it was only after an encounter that they came to realise what they had experienced was non-consensual. Indeed, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) runs an anonymous online platform called [We-Speak](#) where survivors can share their stories, it was noted that some individuals who visited the site did not realise that they had experienced abuse before reading the stories of others. Research from panellists in this session also highlighted the lack of understanding around [coercive control](#) and emotional abuse, and the need for early interventions and education on healthy relationships.

DRCC also run a [We-Consent](#) national campaign to promote and enable better understanding and practice of consent. The campaign acknowledges that sexual violence is highly linked to societal attitudes and beliefs. Results from [DRCC We-Consent Research in 2024](#) found better understanding and more positive attitudes towards consent in almost half of respondents: 78% agreed that sexual activity is consensual when each person is willing all of the time, and 88% agreed that people have a right to change their mind. However problematic attitudes remained, for example, 21% of respondents agreed that ‘Sometimes sex is not fully consensual but is not rape’ and 20% of men under 45 agreed with the statement, ‘I’d probably keep going even if I suspect my partner is not enjoying a sexual encounter’.

Within this context, barriers to reporting were discussed, and data from [ARK](#) found that a higher percentage of females and same sex attracted individuals communicate barriers to reporting, including: being unsure who to talk to, not being sure if it would make a difference; worrying they would not be believed; concerned it would make the situation worse; not feeling it is enough to report; worrying they have done something wrong. It is noteworthy that not being believed was the highest concern for females.

Secondary Victimisation

The concept of secondary victimisation dominated the panel on justice responses. Secondary victimisation occurs when the victim suffers further harm, not as a direct result of the criminal act, but due to the manner in which institutions and other individuals deal with the victim. While the first session of the day setting out the policy context detailed the important work being carried out in the justice sector, including the establishment of [remote](#) evidence centres, holistic support including a new digital information hub for victims of crime called '[My Justice Journey](#)', and further legislative and procedural change forthcoming, it was clear from the presentations that the criminal justice system is often a source of trauma for complainants. Attendees heard about the challenges associated with protecting the complainant's privacy in sexual offence trials in the [Republic](#), specifically those relating to disclosure and admissibility of counselling records and the admissibility of a complainant's sexual experience evidence. In respect of the former, the real life impact of disclosure of counselling records has meant that some complainants delay counselling until after trial or withdraw their complaint. Attendees heard that some complainants waive application of the regime governing disclosure so as not to be seen as obstructive and therefore lose any judicial oversight. In respect of sexual history evidence, a key concern raised was that the procedure determining admissibility of this evidence is often circumvented and confusion around what type of behaviour falls under 'sexual experience evidence' was highlighted.

The relationship between secondary victimisation and the legal definition of sexual consent within the context of the adversarial rape trial in NI was highlighted. In particular, attention was drawn to the way myths and stereotypes surrounding 'real rape', that is rape committed by a stranger involving force and verbal or physical resistance, can dominate the [trial narrative](#) and that often the focus is on how a complainant removed consent as opposed to how the accused ensured consent was present. This discussion aligned with the earlier theme relating to social context, understandings of consent and the role of the traditional sex script. In this respect, the promise of amendments to the legal definition of consent as proposed in the Gillen Review (Recommendation 155) was noted, specifically the reframing of the provision on whether the defendant 'reasonably' believed the complainant consented to include consideration of a defendant's 'failure' to take steps to ascertain whether the complainant consented.

Attendees heard about [research](#) on women's experience of the criminal justice system in NI that revealed an overall lack of trust and confidence. The research found that many women were wary of reporting and feared police responses, and that the degree to which women trusted the police depended on the type of violence they had experienced. Recent revelations around misogyny and abuse within the Police Service of NI (PSNI) have damaged trust among women and act as a disincentive for victims when considering reporting. According to the research, only 21.7% of respondents said they would feel comfortable reporting to the police, but some respondents did feel that PSNI responses had improved. In relation to court, many described their experiences as traumatising. There was a perceived failure on the part of the criminal

justice system to understand the depth of harm experienced by victims of violence against women and girls, from the initial investigation right through to sentencing. Overall, only 8.7% of respondents to this piece of research believe courts take violence against women and girls seriously.

Across the presentations, the need to develop policy and practice to ensure that complainants receive sensitive, respectful and dignified treatment when they engage with the criminal justice system was evident. In order to do this, there must be improved training for criminal justice practitioners, attention must be paid to better protecting victim confidentiality, and the important work around implementing the Gillen Review Recommendations in NI should continue. At the same time, panellists noted the need to carefully consider reform options so as to avoid creating law and procedure more problematic in nature.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The final session of the conference focused on ‘Next Steps’ and took the form of a panel discussion with representatives from key organisations working directly with victims across the island of Ireland. The discussion was framed around the following questions:

Based on your experience: 1) what is the most significant current challenge in the area of violence against women and girls?; and, 2) how do we best address this challenge?

The powerful insights provided during this session highlighted the enduring nature of violence against women and girls and the challenges presented by the normalisation of such violence. The first issue raised was the role of the pornography industry in distorting children’s sexual development and its role in abuse. The scale of the problem was illuminated with reference to research stating that if you viewed all the pornography listed on one site it would take 7,000 years. The second issue noted was primary prevention/social engineering, it was suggested that the hypothesis of data just keeps shifting and levels of adaptation are not happening fast enough for prevention of sexual violence and cultural change. The third issue was that of delay in the criminal justice system, victims of serious sexual offences wait 757 days to complete a trial, compared to a motoring offence that takes an average of 154 days. The fourth issue was the need for strong leadership and investment in the violence against women and girls sector, the sense of disillusionment in the wake of a news cycle that constantly features stories of violence against women and the absence of societal outrage was apparent. The fifth issue related to the burden carried by victims, the emotional, psychological and personal cost of reporting is something that those on the frontline see every day. The last issue raised linked to the fourth, it was the normalisation of violence against women and girls, the social acceptance and tolerance of this violence, the careless terminology used to describe this violence (often in the media) and the social environment that makes this violence palatable.

As the [Strategic Framework](#) states ‘[T]here is something that all of us can do’. The framework further provides that ‘[I]t will require all of us to act and to be involved in change wherever we live, learn, work, and socialise’. Similarly, a key takeaway from the conference was that it is on all of us to disrupt and challenge problematic attitudes, to increase awareness of the abuse and violence experienced by women and girls in our society and to work together to change the narrative and end the violence.

Acknowledgements

The event hugely benefited from input, both in terms of presentations and attendee contributions, from representatives from government departments, statutory agencies, voluntary and community organisations and academia. The Network is immensely grateful to everyone who gave up their time to support the event and provide their expertise.

Thank you to all the conference participants, the student volunteers, the QUB support staff and the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account for making this event possible.

For more information on the All-Ireland Network on Sexual Violence Research and how to join please visit our [website](#).

Conference Programme

9:30 Registration

9:45– 10:00 Welcome – Dr Eithne Dowds, School of Law, QUB and Dr Susan Leahy, School of Law, University of Limerick (UL)

10-11 Opening Remarks – Chair: Dr Susan Leahy School of Law, UL

10:00-10:20 – “Safe and free from fear” – How do we Eradicate Domestic and Sexual Abuse?’
Ms Julie Wilson, Deputy Director of Victims Support Division, NI Department of Justice

10:20-10:40 – ‘Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework – An overview’
Professor Claire Archbold, Director, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Directorate, the Executive Office (TEO) NI

10:40-11:00 – ‘How Cuan is Working Towards Zero Tolerance of DSGBV in Irish Society’
Dr Stephanie O’Keeffe, Cuan, The Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency

11:00-11:15 Break

11:15- 12:45 Prevention & Education – Chair: Dr Elizabeth Agnew, School of Law, QUB

11:15- 11:30 - ‘The Pivotal Role of School Based Education in Preventing Sexual Violence’.
Dr Elaine Byrnes, School of Psychology, Dublin City University

11:30-11:45 - ‘It Starts With Us’ – Outcomes of Healthy Young Adult Relationship (HYAR) Project
Dr Susan Lagdon, School of Psychology, Ulster University

11:45-12:00 – ‘What Use is Large-Scale Survey Data from Young People for Policy Making and Effective Education Strategies to Tackle Violence Against Young Women and Girls?’
Professor Dirk Shubotz, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, QUB

12:00-12:15 - "We-Consent - A National Campaign from DRCC to Support Cultural Change on Consent"
Ms Sarah Monaghan, Consent Project Manager, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

12:15- 12:45 Discussion

12:45- 13:45 Lunch

13:45 – 15:00 Justice Responses – Chair Dr Rosie Cowan, School of Law, QUB

13:45-14:00 – ‘Delivering Justice for Victims of Sexual Violence in Ireland: The Next Steps’
Dr Susan Leahy, School of Law, University of Limerick

14:00-14:15 - The ‘Creative Malice’ of the Rape Trial: Changing the Narrative
Dr Eithne Dowds, School of Law, QUB

14:15-14:30 – “I don’t know how to improve this” – VAWG Survivors’ Experiences of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland’

Ms Elaine Crory, Women's Resource and Development Agency

14:30-15:00 Discussion

15:00 – 16:00 Next Steps – Chair: Dr Eithne Dowds, School of Law, QUB

Ms Joanne Barnes, CEO, Nexus NI

Ms Nichola Greene, Deputy Chief Executive, Victim Support NI

Ms Sonya McMullan, Regional Services Manager, Women’s Aid NI

Dr Clíona Saidléar, Executive Director, Rape Crisis Network Ireland

Ms Deirdre Kenny, CEO, One in Four Ireland

Ms Shirley Scott, Policy Manager, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

16:00-16:15 Close

Speaker Biographies

Professor Claire Archbold, Director, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Directorate, the Executive Office (TEO) NI

Claire Archbold is a senior civil servant and barrister whose 25 year civil service career has included both government legal work and policy-making roles. She leads the cross-Executive Strategic Framework on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and was previously Deputy Head of the Departmental Solicitor's Office (the devolved government's in-house lawyers). A former legal academic, she is and Honorary Professor of Practice in Public Law at Queen's University. As a qualified family mediator, and past Chair of Relate (NI), she has a particular interest in policy and service delivery to protect vulnerable family members and build healthy relationships.

Ms Joanne Barnes, CEO, Nexus NI

Joanne is an experienced leader with over 20 years professional experience co-producing, governing, and delivering innovative clinical and non-clinical services in the community and voluntary and higher education sectors. She is a passionate advocate of community development and engagement approaches to address societal needs and inequalities. For the last two and a half years, Joanne has been leading the work of Nexus, Northern Ireland's leading Sexual Abuse charity. The charity's vision is a society free from sexual abuse and abusive relationships. She works alongside political representatives, service commissioners, policy makers and community and voluntary sector partners to break the cycle of abuse and enable positive change for those impacted by it. To date, this has included supporting the co-design process for the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework. Joanne calls for the full implementation of both to prevent the perpetuation of sexual abuse and violence and to ensure the provision of timely and effective support for victims and survivors.

Ms Elaine Crory, Women's Resource and Development Agency

Elaine Crory is Women's Sector Lobbyist at the Women's Resource & Development Agency (WRDA) working particularly on VAWG. She is also an activist with a number of feminist organisations and teaches adult education classes. She was Specialist Advisor on VAWG to the Women & Equalities Committee at Westminster until June 2024.

Dr Eithne Dowds, School of Law, QUB

Dr Eithne Dowds is a Senior Lecturer in the Law School at Queen's University Belfast. Her research focuses on the legal construction of the crime of rape, with a particular focus on formulations of sexual consent, in international and domestic criminal law. Her monograph, *Feminist Engagement with International Criminal Law* (Hart 2019) explored the relationship between consent and coercion as elements of the crime of rape. More recently, her work has focused on the trend towards the adoption of affirmative notions of consent, as well as legal framings of the accused's mindset in respect of consent. Eithne has responded to a range of consultations including those addressed to the International Criminal Court and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Eithne's work on consent has been cited in the Gillen Review on the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences in Northern Ireland. She is a member of the Legal Expert Council for the Conversations on Consent (CoC)

Campaign and also has an interest in the law and procedure surrounding the prosecution of sexual offences more generally, co-editing a collection of papers on reform efforts in the context of Northern Ireland (Killean, Dowds and McAlinden, *Sexual Offences on Trial*, 2021).

Ms Nichola Greene, Deputy Chief Executive, Victim Support NI

Nichola Greene was appointed Deputy Chief Executive of Victim Support NI in March 2023. Victim Support NI is the leading charity providing support to victims and witnesses of all types of crime across Northern Ireland. Nichola has over a decade of experience in the support sector. She began her career with Citizens Advice, then moved to Parentline NI, where she worked as a Senior Service Manager and later as Service Manager of their well-utilised helpline for parents. In 2021, she joined Nexus to manage Clinical Services along with the 24/7 Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline before taking up her current role at Victim Support NI. Nichola is an MBACP-accredited counsellor and holds two BSc qualifications, in Counselling & Mental Health and Communication with Counselling. She is passionate about mental health, the impact trauma has on one's identity, and ensuring the criminal justice system is improved to better meet victims' needs.

Ms Deirdre Kenny, CEO, One in Four Ireland

Deirdre is the CEO of One in Four, an organisation that provides professional supports to individuals who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, those who engage in sexually harmful behaviour and the families of both. With over 20 years of experience in the NGO sector in Ireland and Africa, she has worked on issues like HIV/AIDS, prostitution, human trafficking, and child protection. This background gives her a deep understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, allowing her to develop comprehensive solutions. Additionally, Deirdre is a Restorative Justice Facilitator and trainer. Her work embodies empathy and advocacy and accountability, aiming to help survivors find support and rebuild their lives.

Dr Susan Lagdon, School of Psychology, Ulster University

Dr Susan Lagdon is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology (Mental Health) at Ulster University and a fellow of the UK higher education academy. Susan is also co-chair of Northern Ireland Forensic Managed Care Network and Cross Island COSHARE (Consent, Sexual Violence, Harassment and Equality in Higher Education) Network. Susan's research interests include domestic and sexual violence and abuse, particularly the mental health implications of interpersonal trauma and the availability and types of support for victims. Susan's work involves the use of multiple mix methods with a particular focus on participatory and stakeholder engagement to guide research process.

Dr Susan Leahy, School of Law, University of Limerick

Susan Leahy is an Associate Professor in the School of Law at the University of Limerick. She is the Director of the Centre for Crime, Justice and Victim Studies (CCJVS) research centre and co-founder of the All-Ireland Network for Sexual Violence Research (AINSVR). Susan's research focuses primarily on sexual offences, domestic abuse and the victims' rights. She has published her research in books and national and international peer-reviewed journals, and completed a number of funded research projects on sexual offences, gender-based violence and victims of crime. Her funded research includes a 2021 report, *The Realities of Irish Rape Trials: Perspectives from Practice*, which was funded by the Irish Research Council and

conducted in partnership with Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. This research involved interviews with Irish legal professionals and court accompaniment workers who work within Irish rape trials. Susan is currently completing research on media reporting of sexual violence in Ireland, conducted in partnership with the Sexual Violence Centre Cork, and funded by the Irish Research Council.

Ms Sarah Monaghan, Consent Project Manager, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Sarah Monaghan is Consent Project Manager at Dublin Rape Crisis Centre where she runs the We-Consent Campaign, which is a new long-term national programme to inform, educate and engage with all members of our society about consent. Sarah has been involved in the Abortion Rights Campaign - a grassroots, activist, and all voluntary group, since 2014. Sarah worked mainly on regional grassroots development, before being elected co-leader. In 2018, she co-founded Together for Yes (National Referendum campaign to remove the abortion ban in Ireland) where she sat on the core executive decision body and acted as spokesperson for the campaign. She was a Director on the Campaign to Re-Elect President Michael D Higgins in 2018. Sarah was a board member of the National Women's Council from 2019-2024.

Ms Sonya McMullan, Regional Services Manager, Women's Aid NI

Sonya McMullan is the Regional Services Manager for Women's Aid Federation NI and has worked for Women's Aid in different roles since 1999. She previously managed the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline and co-ordinated the development and implementation of the helpline to include sexual abuse. Sonya has a background in law and a keen interest in legal issues relation to domestic and sexual abuse and has completed several pieces of research in this area. More recently she has worked closely on the new Domestic Abuse Offence and subsequent new legislation in the areas of domestic and sexual abuse on a policy level. She has contributed to Killean, R., Dowds, E. and McAlinden, A.M. eds., 2021. *Sexual violence on trial: Local and comparative perspectives*. Routledge. Sonya studied at Queen's University Belfast and has a BSSc in Social Policy, MSSc in Criminal Justice and Human Rights Law and a BLEgSci in Legal Science. She currently sits on the Senior Committee at Rosario YFC and Carafriend.

Dr Stephanie O'Keeffe, Cuan, The Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency

Dr. Stephanie O'Keeffe was appointed as the first CEO of Cuan in February 2024. Dr O'Keeffe previously worked in the Health Service Executive (HSE) as the National Director of Health and Wellbeing and more recently National Director of Operations Planning. She has over 20 years' experience of working in the Irish public service, across a number of organisations and, was responsible for delivering Ireland's first 'whole-of-government' population health strategy - Healthy Ireland, while working in the Department of Health. She will be seconded to Cuan for the duration of her five year term as CEO. In addition to a range of academic qualifications and professional and development achievements, Dr O'Keeffe holds a PhD in psychology and has Diploma and Certificate qualifications from the Institute of Directors Ireland."

Dr Clíona Saidléar, Executive Director, Rape Crisis Network Ireland

Dr Clíona Saidléar is the Executive Director of Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI). Clíona has spent 20 years specialising in and advocating on all forms of sexual violence and the systems necessary to respond and prevent. She was a Ministerial appointment to the working group that developed the HEI Framework for Consent and now sits on the HEA advisory body

for same. She has been called upon internationally to share her expertise at European and UN levels and has been working with partners across Europe on developing models and standards on sexual violence specialisation. She is a board member of the National Statistics Board and the Health Research Board and currently chairs the Children Living with Domestic and Sexual Violence Ngo coalition group. Her PhD is in International Politics and she has previously worked in a union, with a political party and in the disability sector.

Ms Shirley Scott, Policy Manager, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Shirley Scott, is the policy manager at Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, where she has worked since 2004, holding a number of different positions within the organisation. Actively involved in voluntary work for much of her adult life, she recently concluded a nine-year term on the board of Bethany, the National Bereavement Support Group for Adults. She currently serves on the board of the National Women's Council. Shirley holds a Bachelor of Business Studies from Dublin City University, a BA in Humanities and an MA in Human Development from St Patrick's College (DCU) along with an Advanced Diploma in Data Protection Law from the Honourable Society of King's Inn.

Professor Dirk Shubotz, School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, QUB

Dirk Schubotz is Professor of Youth and Social Policy at Queen's University Belfast. He is a member of ARK, Northern Ireland's Social Policy Hub, and has directed annual the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland since 2003. YLT is used to inform policy making for young people on a range of issues, including the prevention of violence against young women and girls. Whilst Dirk is interested in most aspects of young people's lives, he has a long track record in research and advocacy in the field of sexual health, and relationships and sexuality education. He helped to establish the 'Report and Support' scheme at Queen's University. Dirk is also a member of AINSVR and the Centre of Children's Rights and has been a member of the Gillen Education and Awareness Group. Dirk is currently Chair of Board of Trustees of Common Youth.

Ms Julie Wilson, Deputy Director of Victims Support Division, NI Department of Justice

Julie is Deputy Director of Victims Support Division in the Northern Ireland Department of Justice and leads on the strategic response to domestic and sexual abuse and implementation of the Gillen Review on the law and procedures in sexual offences, as well as wider policies and interventions to support victims and witnesses of crime. She chairs the Senior Oversight Forum to the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process which is responsible for commissioning DHRs and for oversight and governance of the DHR process. She also is Senior Responsible Officer for implementation of the Gillen Review Programme – which is a major programme to reform the law and procedures around serious sexual offences. Within this context has led on the introduction of publicly funded Legal Advisers for complainants in serious sexual offences, new Remote Evidence Centres and the establishment of the Victims of Crime Commissioner's role. Partnership, collaboration and working with other organisations and sectors underpin delivery across all of Julie's responsibilities. Previously she led the Department of Justice's response to modern slavery and played a key role in the development of legislation to tackle human trafficking in Northern Ireland. She has held a range of posts in both Whitehall and the Northern Ireland Civil Service including work on organised crime, policing, prisons and the Northern Ireland political process. She is a former teacher and, before joining the civil service, established and managed an award-winning peer education programme to tackle homelessness.