

Apprenticeship CARE: Consent Awareness and Respect for Everyone

The Apprenticeship CARE Survey and Development of Learning Resources on Consent Promotion, Sexual Violence Prevention and Response

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and

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Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

This executive summary presents the key findings and recommendations from the Apprenticeship Consent Awareness and Respect for Everyone (CARE) Survey. Conducted through a collaboration between the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Department (Apprenticeship Supports) at Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB) and the Active* Consent programme at the University of Galway, the survey captures, for the first time in Ireland, the perspectives of apprentices on consent, sexual violence and harassment (SVH), relationships, and associated social norms.

This is the first time apprentices in Ireland have been directly asked about consent, sexual violence and harassment, providing the foundation for creating targeted educational resources.

Drawing on responses from 723 apprentices, the demographic profile of respondents reflected craft apprenticeship programmes nationally; 96% identified as male and 92% were aged less than 25. Participants were drawn primarily from construction (62%), industrial (24%), and mechanical (14%) apprenticeship programmes. Over half of respondents (54%) reported being in a relationship at the time of the survey.

The findings highlight both strengths in views and attitudes and critical gaps that should be addressed. Apprentices demonstrated broadly positive attitudes towards getting consent for any form of intimacy, yet demonstrated challenges in applying these principles in real-world scenarios. This gap between knowledge and practice, particularly in contexts involving alcohol, digital intimacy, and peer

dynamics, represents a key finding of the report.

The Apprenticeship CARE Survey findings provide evidence to inform a settings-based approach to consent education and culture change, aligned with national priorities in the Further Education and Training sector on inclusion, wellbeing, and learner support. The report provides examples of how the survey findings can be used to co-create innovative educational resources in partnership with apprentices themselves.

Key Findings

1. Consent Awareness and Application of Principles

Responses to survey items demonstrated that apprentices overwhelmingly endorsed the principles of active consent founded on communication.

93% of participants agreed that verbal consent should be obtained before sexual intercourse, and 88% agreed that verbal consent should apply to all forms of intimacy.

Despite this strong baseline, apprentices in the survey identified challenges related to communication and practice:

- Almost half (**46%**) agreed they would continue to move forward in sexual behaviours until their partner stopped them.

- **50%** reported that verbally asking for consent was awkward.
- Only **51%** had discussed consent with a friend.

These findings indicated that, while apprentices understood what consent is, they also experienced obstacles. There is a need to support apprentices to become more comfortable talking about consent and checking in with a partner.

2. *Applied Consent in Real-Life Scenarios*

The Apprenticeship CARE Survey featured four story scenarios that featured consent. The responses made to the stories provided a deeper understanding of how apprentices interpret consent in context. There was a consistent pattern: Apprentices' reactions often did not reflect the clear principles they had earlier endorsed because the stories portrayed consent ambiguously and in the context of alcohol use and non-verbal cues.

Apprentices showed strong support for verbal consent in principle but frequently relied on contextual and non-verbal cues.

- In a case involving pressure to share intimate images, 43% still believed consent was present, despite 83% recognising that the individual felt pressured to share.
- In a scenario featuring alcohol intoxication and non-verbal cues, 48% inferred that consent to sex was present

because the couple had been kissing earlier in the evening, while 44% agreed that there was consent to sex because the woman partner smiled when the man produced a condom.

- Across the stories, a large percentage of participants (often one third or more) selected the neutral response in response to questions, indicating uncertainty about how to respond to consent dilemmas.
- These findings suggest that educational approaches must build on the awareness of consent principles and extend the apprentices' skills for critical thinking, communication skills, and applied judgement about consent.

3. *Alcohol and Consent*

Apprentices' understanding of how alcohol impacts the capacity to consent was inconsistent.

- Up to **44%** of apprentices were unsure whether alcohol impaired the ability to give consent.
- Only **52%** agreed that individuals were too drunk to consent in a scenario where the story characters were described as drunk and unsteady on their feet.
- In a story that relied on describing the impact of alcohol by focusing on describing the amount of alcohol consumed, just **29%** of participants agreed that they were too drunk to give consent.

In their open-text feedback, apprentices highlighted the need for education on alcohol and consent.

These findings point to the priority for education on how alcohol impacts capacity and impairs the capacity to give consent – including reference to legal responsibilities.

4. Digital Intimacy

Digital intimacy, including the sharing of explicit images with a partner, is a significant issue:

32% of apprentices had sent intimate images and 68% had received them.

There was a strong recognition of the risk of image sharing:

- Over **80%** recognised intimate image sharing as risky and creating vulnerability.
- **72%** believed it may lead to future problems.

However, attitudes were ambivalent:

- Over **50%** viewed intimate image sharing as exciting or positive.
- **48%** agreed that it is a normal feature of relationships.

Apprentices simultaneously perceived digital intimacy as high-risk and normal; a dual perception that reflects the need for design and implement exercises that support critical thinking about this issue.

5. Bystander Intervention

Apprentices demonstrated confidence to intervene in high-risk situations. Nearly all felt at least somewhat prepared to act, and the vast majority responded positive to specific situations:

80% of apprentices agreed that they would act to prevent potential physical sexual violence.

However, the likelihood of intervention dropped for everyday problematic behaviours:

- **36%** would challenge sexist language.
- Only **21%** would challenge sexist jokes.

These findings suggest a need for extending bystander intervention into outreach approaches with apprentices, including addressing the everyday sexism that helps to perpetuates sexual violence.

6. Gender Norms

Responses to gender-related statements revealed divided views among apprentices:

- **31%** agreed that “men are always ready for sex.”
- **58%** disagreed that it is a woman’s responsibility to prevent sexual activity from progressing.
- A large proportion (from **25–31%** of apprentices) remained neutral across all gendered beliefs.

Apprentices occupy a spectrum from traditional to progressive views, with a substantial group expressing uncertainty.

This ambivalence highlights an opportunity for critical reflection on gender norms and stereotypes – which would allow apprentices to consider how these views impact on consent and relationships.

7. Consent Education

While 76% of apprentices were satisfied with the sex education that they had previously received, the delivery methods used to engage them on the subject of consent were largely passive:

- **93%** received talks.
- **80%** watched videos.

Less than half (46%) of apprentices had experienced interactive, discussion-based consent workshops.

Meanwhile, apprentices reported learning most about sex and relationships from a previous or current partner:

- **90%** identified romantic partners as a key source.
- Other sources such as peers (**78%**) and school (**80%**) were also important, with media (**38%**) and pornography (**25%**) cited less often.

These findings reinforced the need for more engaging, applied learning approaches.

8. Awareness of Supports

The survey identified varying levels of awareness of supports and reporting mechanisms.

A majority of respondents indicated that they knew where to access support (57%) or report incidents (62%) within their college or training centre.

Preparedness to respond to disclosures was moderate:

- **35%** felt well prepared;
- **13%** felt not prepared at all.

These findings highlight the importance of ensuring that all apprentices know what supports and services are available to them: in their colleges and training centres, in their local communities, and online.

Apprentices' Voices: Priorities for Education

Open-ended responses provided valuable insight into learner needs. For example, one participant said they wanted to learn more about *"How to ask for consent without it being awkward."*

Key requested topics include:

- Practical communication skills
- Alcohol and drugs
- Digital intimacy
- Legal clarity
- Healthy relationships
- Social pressures and norms

Learners also emphasised the value of interactive learning formats:

"Group discussions to see others' opinions... everyone sharing their honest views."

Resistance was present among a minority, particularly around perceptions of masculinity and relevance, reinforcing the need for inclusive, balanced messaging.

Innovation in Practice: Co-Creation and Workshop Development

The Apprenticeship CARE Survey findings informed the development of a pilot workshop using participatory methods, which explored how the findings could be used to support:

- Scenario-based learning
- Group debate activities
- Practical communication exercises
- Application of the "OMFG" (Ongoing, Mutual, Freely Given) model

Following delivery to **48** apprentices, feedback was highly positive as **100%** of participants would recommend the workshop.

"Good fun and educational... really good for communicating consent."

This demonstrates the potential for co-created, learner-centred approaches to engaging apprentices.

Recommendations

A set of **17** recommendations were designed, under the following themes:

- **Establish a system for consent education to be delivered within apprenticeship programmes**
- **Content of consent education for apprenticeships**
- **A whole of institution approach to culture change**
- **Create a strategic approach to consent education in apprenticeship programmes**
- **Share progress with the FET sector and relevant stakeholders**

Conclusion

The findings of the Apprenticeship CARE Survey represent a step forward in understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of this group in relation to consent, relationships, and sexual violence and harassment. It provides the insight that, while supportive of consent and respectful relationships, apprentices nonetheless must navigate complex social norms and practical challenges when applying these values.

The findings demonstrated the challenges that arise as obstacles to the translation of positive intentions. The commitment to culture change that will address these issues needs to be sustained, applied, and context-sensitive – grounded in the lived experiences of learners.

At a critical point in the development of Government strategy on apprenticeships and the Further Education & Training sector, there is an opportunity to equip apprentices with the skills, confidence, and learning environment needed to put respect and consent into practice.

With strategic leadership, investment, and collaboration across the FET sector, Ireland is well positioned to lead internationally in embedding consent education within apprenticeship training supporting safer, more inclusive learning environments for all.

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