ACTIVE*CONSENT

Galway Rape Crisis Centre
SERVICES FOR SEXUAL TRAUMA & ABUSE

FIRST POINT OF CONTACT: DISCLOSURE MANAGEMENT SKILLS TRAINING

RESEARCH EVALUATION STUDY

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THE ACTIVE* CONSENT PROGRAMME

Based at the School of Psychology in the University of Galway, the Active* Consent programme has pioneered sexual consent education and research with young people throughout Ireland since 2013. The programme ethos is that consent is Ongoing, Mutual, and Freely Given – for all relationships, genders and orientations. Consent is for everyone and for everything. It's for each type of intimacy, if or when someone chooses to become intimate.

Active* Consent brings together expertise from areas like psychology, health promotion, theatre and drama, psychotherapy, social work, nursing, and social media. Active* Consent has grown into a national programme over this time – enabling institutions to adopt innovative research-driven solutions through strategies such as research, educational resources, training, workshops, theatre, and information campaigns.

One key learning over the past decade is that this work is founded on socio-ecological culture change. The First Point of Contact project is an example of the commitment we have to the capacity building of staff members and suggesting solutions for how organisations can incorporate innovation. Working together with partners such as Galway Rape Crisis Centre, our initiatives take a learning community through a tiered, spiral model of increasing complexity. These range from brief social media messaging, onto workshops and arts-based interventions, and specialised training offered to staff members and community leaders.

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FOREWORD

The Galway Rape Crisis Centre (GRCC) stands as a pillar of support for survivors of sexual violence and abuse, offering professional counselling services of the highest quality.

Since its inception in 1984, GRCC has grown significantly, driven by a mission to address the critical need for services for survivors of sexual abuse. Over time our commitment has expanded to also encompass support for male survivors.

Our committed team at GRCC presently consists of 31 staff members and a network of passionate volunteers. Underpinning our operations is a strong emphasis on transparency and accountability. At GRCC, we are not only dedicated to providing essential support services but also to driving change through education and advocacy, striving for a future free from sexual violence and abuse.

The GRCC Education Department is dedicated to shaping a more inclusive future by providing training and education programmes that encompasses schools, workplaces and community projects. Since the department's official formation in 2020 our primary goal is to eradicate pervasive societal tolerance of sexual violence. We do this through advocacy, awareness campaigns and comprehensive education initiatives.

The experiential element of the First Point of Contact (FPOC) training is unique. The survivor's experience is always held at the core of the training. It enables the FPOC participants to expand their knowledge and awareness of sexual violence. This training also broadens their emotional capacity to receive and hold a disclosure of sexual violence, and

signpost on to supports. We believe the power of FPOC, and the integral role of GRCC specialist involvement, contributes to the cultural shift in the eradication of sexual violence and harassment.

First Point of Contact was developed by Galway Rape Crisis Centre in collaboration with the Active* Consent. We are very proud of its ongoing success and our successful partnership with the Active* Consent team. While we have trained people from all around the country on FPOC through our partnership in continuous professional development and engagement with Further Education & Training sector, the engagement of the University of Galway has allowed us to establish a case for sustained institutional integration.

Cathy Connolly

Cathy Connolly
Director, Galway Rape Crisis Centre
November 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First Point of Contact (FPOC) disclosure management skills training

FPOC is a 12-hour psychotherapist-led training programme that prepares participants to receive disclosures of sexual violence and harassment (SVH) and to signpost to relevant supports and services. The training has been devised and delivered through a collaboration between the Galway Rape Crisis Centre (GRCC) and the Active* Consent programme. This research study used a mixed methods research design to evaluate the FPOC training and make recommendations about its sustainability into the future.

As well as having specialist psychotherapists from GRCC lead the training, support has been provided by therapists based at the University of Galway Student Counselling Service. Implementation of FPOC has had a particular focus on the University of Galway, where 157 participants were trained up to June 2024. Additional participants have joined our Level 9 10-ECTS accredited continuous professional development module that has run since 2021, and through a consent promotion initiative delivered to the Further Education & Training sector that has been supported by the Department of Justice and now Cuan.

Purpose of this evaluation research study

- To study the experience and satisfaction of staff and students who have completed the FPOC training.

- To make recommendations for the future development of the FPOC training with regard to efficacy, inclusion, and sustainability in particular.

Summary of research in the area of disclosure skills training

Research to date suggests that there is scope to enhance the provision of standardised disclosure management skills training in education settings and other organisations. While disclosure training recommendations have been suggested, guidance on training content requires further clarification and development. Research indicates the importance of having culturally specific disclosure skills training content. A comprehensive implementation model for sustainable disclosure skills training is lacking in the research carried out to date.

Data collection and research methods:

A mixed methods research design was used to evaluate FPOC training:

- 154 participants completed an online survey that evaluated the FPOC training programme. The survey provided quantitative and qualitative data that were analysed and reported on.

- Focus group interviews, individual stakeholder interviews, and a follow up survey of FPOC participants were conducted and analysed using thematic and content analysis.

Findings

The participants described the FPOC training as providing the skills required for them to feel prepared and confident in receiving a disclosure of sexual violence or harassment. Participants agreed that there were benefits to taking part in FPOC training, including those who had earlier experience of disclosure training or relevant job roles, along with those who did not have prior training experience.

Positive feedback was given on the FPOC training process, as reflected in online survey responses on the planning of sessions, FPOC trainer skills, and the positive environment established between trainers and participants. The content of the training sessions was also evaluated positively, with particular reference made to the learning associated with role play exercises and critical reflection on sexual violence myths.

The participants provided suggestions to enhance FPOC training further, such as extending trainer guidance and feedback and content related to diversity and culture change. Overall, participants described having achieved significant learning that they valued. Nearly all would recommend undertaking FPOC training to their colleagues.

Recommendations for future disclosure training standards and sustainability:

A sustainability model was developed to guide future development of the FPOC training. The key recommendations of the evaluation research are drawn from this model:

1. **Maintain the high standard of training in the FPOC delivery model**
Training should continue to be provided by specialist facilitators. The time requirement of the training should be maintained to make it feasible to include experiential learning and critical reflection. Implementation of the standardised training programme should be monitored to ensure that there is fidelity to the approved content and mode of delivery. Feedback from participants and ongoing engagement with experts and research should be prioritised to ensure that FPOC training is continually enhanced.

2. **Enhance existing training**
Areas for further improvement in training content and delivery were noted. These included greater coverage of diversity and intersectionality, culture change, disclosures of SVH perpetration, and additional information on policy and procedures related to SVH.

3. **Sustaining the FPOC role**
The training experience itself should be complemented by access to resources and support afterwards. This could include provision of standard reference material that participants can rely on to ground their response in the practice they have been trained to deliver. Refresher training should be provided regularly to people who have completed the training, ensuring that their key FPOC skills and knowledge are maintained. Additional training opportunities should be made available to extend the participant's skill set. Peer support and networking were continually emphasised by training participants as a required follow up to sustain the role, while group supervision and access to specialised support were equally seen as a priority for sustainability.

4. **Visible and accessible**
Recruitment to FPOC training should be targeted to ensure that it achieves coverage across an institution. Those people who have completed the training and wish to be identified in the role should have their contact information made available through a method approved and monitored by the institution. The FPOC role should be promoted as a support that assists individuals through signposting and in providing a space for listening.

5. **Grounded in the organisation**
For sustainability, the FPOC role in an institution should be set out clearly and the boundaries to the role ought to be delineated. The role should be recognised in institutional policy and procedures, with recognition of the contribution made featuring in workload allocation models. It is important to monitor levels of informal disclosures made to people trained in FPOC, in an appropriate way that ensures it continues to be the person's choice to make a report or not. Institutional concerns about meeting the needs of an increasing number of people who might make an official report should be addressed by reviewing access to specialised supports.

BACKGROUND

'Disclosure of sexual violence or harassment (SVH)' refers to an individual informing someone else, formally or informally, about their experience (Sabina & Ho, 2014). The capacity for members of an organisational community to have a safe, well supported outlet for telling someone what has happened to them is a basic requirement arising from the duty of care obligations of employers and education providers. Yet a well worked out infrastructure of this kind is typically not present in educational settings, posing a fundamental issue for any organisation that is striving to achieve the culture change now recognised to be a priority in Irish national policy (Department of Justice, 2024; Department for Further, Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science, 2019).

Disclosure management skills training refers to actions intended to prepare participants to learn how to respond to disclosures of SVH. Traditionally, disclosure training has taken on a range of formats, including self-directed online training and in-person training of variable duration (Alldred & Phipps, 2018, Jones et al., 2021). This report describes an evaluation carried out on the 'First Point of Contact' (FPOC) disclosure management skills training programme, a collaboration between Active* Consent, Galway Rape Crisis Centre, and partners including the University of Galway. Since 2021, approximately 300 individuals have completed the 12-hour training, including Higher Education (HE) students and staff members, Further Education & Training (FET) sector staff, along with professionals from other education settings, statutory organisations, NGOs, and community groups.

The evaluation is largely based on feedback provided by participants who took part in FPOC training and stakeholders during 2023 and 2024. The evaluation assesses whether the training content and delivery format was acceptable and impactful for participants. It goes on to consider how to ensure that high quality, standardised training is rolled out as the norm for organisations, with the aim of meeting the basic requirement that organisations are prepared when any of their members wish to disclose sexual violence or harassment.

The relevance of disclosure training is underscored by recent research in the Irish Higher Education (HE) sector on SVH. For example, 44% of Irish students surveyed reported that they had been subjected to sexual violence since joining college, and a majority indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment (Burke et al., 2020). Thus, it is important for the HE sector to have structures in place that will support students who choose to disclosure what has happened to them, whether or not they intend to engage with the formal complaints and investigation processes in their institution. The assertion that SVH is experienced relatively commonly in the HE sector is reflected in research with undergraduates and postgraduates in the UK, Europe, and the US (The Student Room & Revolt Sexual Assault, 2018, Bull & Page, 2021, Schredle et al., 2023). Further Irish evidence on this issue was provided by the 2021 Higher Education Authority (HEA) national survey of students (MacNeela et al., 2022a).

An emerging body of work has extended this exploration to the experiences of Higher Education staff. For example, the 2021 HEA national survey found that 59% of staff members who chose to respond to the survey invitation had experienced

sexist hostility (MacNeela et al., 2022b). Approximately half of the staff were treated differently on the basis of their gender, with a similar percentage describing having been condescended to because of gender. One-quarter of the staff respondents had been subjected to sexualised comments related to gender. One in eight described sexualised comments related to their sexual orientation. A similar proportion of staff had been touched in a way that made them feel uncomfortable, while one in twenty had experienced unwelcome attempts at stroking or kissing. However, in common with students, few staff members indicated that they had made a formal report to their institution. Research with HE staff internationally has raised concerns about their exposure to SVH (Bondestaam & Lundqvist, 2020). More recently, the COSHARE all-island study of staff experiences in Ireland has provided additional evidence on this issue (Lagdon et al., 2024).

Thus, the pressing need for a disclosure skills management training infrastructure within Higher Education institutions has been clearly demonstrated. It is further contextualised by the trend in research surveys for many students and staff to make disclosures to peers rather than through formal channels (Burke et al., 2020; MacNeela et al., 2022a / b; Lagdon et al., 2024). Indeed, up to one-third of students and staff in such surveys have indicated that they had not disclosed what had happened to them outside of the survey itself. Moreover, the description of high SVH rates in findings of the ground-breaking Central Statistics Office study of a representative sample of adults in Ireland (CSO, 2022) suggests that the need for greater disclosure preparedness extends throughout Irish society.

The relevance of disclosure training is underscored by recent research in the Irish Higher Education (HE) sector on SVH. For example, 44% of Irish students surveyed reported that they had been subjected to sexual violence since joining college, and a majority indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment.

Research on disclosure management skills

The World Health Organisation (WHO & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010) identified three levels of prevention employed to combat and respond to sexual violence:

- Primary prevention, including interventions designed to reduce incidents of sexual violence.

- Secondary prevention, involving targeted interventions in high-risk situations.

- Tertiary prevention, which addresses harms that have occurred following an incident.

Disclosure management is taken here to be a tertiary prevention strategy intended to moderate harm after an incident has occurred. Qualitative interviews with rape survivors indicate the value of having a skilled, validating response to a disclosure. Disbelieving or insensitive responses to disclosure may decrease the likelihood that survivors make a subsequent disclosure or formal report (Ahrens, 2006, Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Negative reactions can cause survivors to doubt the validity that their experience was rape (Ahrens, 2006). Thus, negative reactions from professionals can cause survivors to question whether making a formal report would be appropriate for them, while negative peer and family reactions can prompt feelings of shame and guilt.

The reactions of others can have long term implications for recovery. For instance, negative reactions to disclosures of SVH are associated with heightened mental health distress symptomatology (Orchowski et al., 2013). In contrast, receiving a positive response to a disclosure may act as a protective factor against worsened health outcomes (Bogen et al., 2019). Such responses are reflected in reactions such as having someone express belief in the survivor's account of their experience, displays of empathy, and providing information on supportive resources. Therefore, one of the goals of establishing and promoting disclosure training is to ensure that survivors have the opportunity to disclosure to an individual who provides an affirming, supportive reaction. This could potentially help to mitigate the harm arising from their experience of SVH, and may affect their later choices about making a formal report.

Furthermore, the wellbeing of the person being disclosed to represents a priority in the design of disclosure systems. Preparation of staff and students to respond to a disclosure involves taking a trauma-informed approach to training, which emphasises self-care as a means to reduce risks that may arise from informal peer-to-peer disclosures. For instance, the person who receives a disclosure can be affected by vicarious trauma, in which signs of trauma result from absorbing information about SVH without direct personal experience (AbiNader et al., 2023). In studying the impact of working with victim-survivors of sexual violence, Crivatu, Horvath and Massey (2023) drew attention to negative impacts of this area of work including trauma symptoms, disrupted relationships, and emotional or psychological distress. They suggest mitigating negative impacts such as these by providing organisational supports, supervision, guidance, and training.

Empathic concern and victim-blaming attitudes have been identified as predictors of how an individual is likely to respond to a disclosure being shared with them. This is reflected in the recommendation that training incorporates dispelling of rape myths and promoting empathy towards survivors

(Sears-Greer et al., 2022). A review by Halstead and colleagues (2017) found that those receiving disclosures were more likely to have had non-consensual sexual experiences themselves and were vulnerable to re-traumatisation. Sears-Greer and colleagues (2022) have recently recommended that resources and training on disclosure management should include information on how people who receive disclosures can successfully manage the difficult emotions which may arise when handling disclosures.

Internationally, diverse forms of disclosure management training have emerged. In the U.S., Bogen and colleagues (2019) reviewed websites of 60 institutional members of the Association of American Universities to assess the information provided to students on how to respond to peer disclosures of SVH. This review found that all of the websites provided information on their sexual misconduct policy, as mandated by Title IX of the Educational Amendment, 1972 (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1997). All universities provided information on resources for survivors of sexual violence.

Yet only 32 institutional websites had pages providing specific information to students on how to respond to disclosures (Bogen et al., 2019). The most common format for this information was to give positive social reactions to a disclosure (e.g., "I believe you") and describe reactions that should be avoided (e.g., victim-blaming, taking control). Information on self-care for those receiving disclosures was cited in only ten of the dedicated webpages. Bogen and colleagues (2019) also found that only half of the institutional websites reviewed had a dedicated page on disclosure management.

Amar and colleagues (2014) studied a nationally representative sample of U.S. college campus administrators to evaluate institutional sexual assault policies and procedures. They found that 85% of campuses offered some training to students in how to respond to sexual assault. However, the content of these trainings varied, ranging from general information on sexual assault resources for victims, institutional policies and procedures, to how to respond and help a victim. Training delivery was again varied, including inclusion in orientation offered to new students (60%), curriculum infusion (49%), or dissemination through peer educators (42%). While support for victim-survivors was covered by some of these training, disclosure management training was not widely practiced.

To date, SVH management training for university staff in the U.S. has largely focused on training responsible employees to fulfil legal obligations under Title IX, including ensuring that mandatory reports are made and that options are explained to survivors. The emotional wellbeing and recovery of the survivor has not been emphasised to the same extent (Holland et al., 2018). Griffin and colleagues (2022) used qualitative analysis to research why college students did not report incidents of sexual assault. An analysis of tweets under the hashtag #WhyIDidntReport highlighted the role that negative reactions to disclosures played in the decision not to report, prompting the recommendation for disclosure training to be incorporated in bystander programmes.

In the UK and Europe, the EU-funded 'USVreact: University Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence' training programme provided learning from efforts undertaken in seven universities (Martini & De Piccoli,

2021). Aside from establishing and providing disclosure training in these universities, the USVreact project also aimed to conduct a best practice review of first response and disclosure training (Alldred & Phipps, 2018).

One such training was implemented at the University of Sussex and University of Brighton. This project focused on promoting empathy and openness to disclosures, as well as broadening participants' perspectives on SVH as a gendered issue (Phipps et al., 2017). Key training messages included that:

- Sexual violence is a gendered phenomenon that can happen to anyone.

- SVH incidents occur within a wider university and social context.

- Rape myth beliefs contribute to hesitancy to disclose.

- The effects of trauma vary from person to person.

- Empathy and empowerment of survivor choice are important parts of the disclosure response.

A variety of teaching techniques were employed, including experiential learning through dyadic role-plays so that empathic listening and grounding techniques could be practiced. The training was delivered in a trauma-informed manner, with ground rules, trigger warnings, and ample time for group and individual reflection to protect the welfare of participants (Phipps et al., 2017). In evaluating the training during post-training feedback sessions, some participants described enjoying meeting staff members from different areas of the university team and learning from their peers. Others wished to hear from those in similar roles as themselves in order to discuss common difficulties which may arise.

On balance, Phipps and colleagues (2017) recommended that in-person training be delivered to more homogenous groups.

They also expressed concern regarding the self-selection of trainees, as most trainees were women, and recommended an approach that would ensure higher levels of staff engagement and greater diversity in recruitment. The final report of the USVreact program (Alldred & Phipps, 2018) recommended that similar training should be rolled out to all university staff. They saw staff in relevant frontline roles such as counselling services, student support, and campus security as a particular priority before training is rolled out to all staff.

The final report acknowledged that there are advantages and disadvantages to mandating staff to engage in this training. Mandatory training addresses the self-selection arising from a volunteer training model, yet requiring staff to engage could cause resentment from staff who would be otherwise unwilling to take part. Alldred and Phipps (2018) also recommended that a dedicated staff member should exist to act as a trained liaison point in each institution. However, the report stressed that this individual's role should be to provide expertise and support to their peers, while all staff would have the capacity to respond directly to a disclosure.

Thus far, research and evaluation of disclosure management practices and initiatives has established the potential for disclosure management skills to be scaled up on college campuses. The USVreact project has shared learning about how best to provide this training. As yet, however, there is no consensus apparent on the criteria for what should be included as core training content to prepare individuals to respond to a disclosure. The evaluation of the First Point of Contact initiative in Ireland contributes to this discussion by assessing specific components of FPOC training. Furthermore, the USVreact final report acknowledged that the content of the training ought to be culturally specific (Alldred & Phipps, 2018). Hence, this training provides an example of disclosure management training in the Irish context.

FIRST POINT OF CONTACT DISCLOSURE MANAGEMENT SKILLS TRAINING

The First Point of Contact (FPOC) training described in this report is a 12-hour psychotherapist-led training that typically takes place across four weekly sessions. Galway Rape Crisis Centre has led on provision of the therapist input, with additional contributions from the University of Galway Student Counselling Service. The training itself can be facilitated in-person or online, as a standalone programme or as a component of wider training. Thus, it has appeared since 2021 as part of the continuing professional development (CPD) module led by Active* Consent and accredited by the University of Galway, *Consent, Sexual Violence and Harassment: Practitioner Skills & Practice*.

The FPOC training was developed by Galway Rape Crisis Centre (GRCC) and the Active* Consent programme, delivered in partnership with the University of Galway Student Counselling Service and the Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. The content and delivery process of FPOC training has expanded on the original disclosure training established by GRCC. Adaptations were made by changing and expanding content including role play scenarios and exercises, and by adding material to highlight the importance of community and campus culture change.

While originally designed for the Higher Education campus community, FPOC groups have either included or specifically targeted staff members in the Further Education & Training sector. CPD module participants have come from a wide range of backgrounds, including post-primary schools, NGOs and community organisations, student advocacy organisations such as Students' Unions, and statutory bodies including the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochana.

The aim of FPOC training is to provide participants with the relevant preparation, information, and skills required to support a person who discloses an incident of SVH. The learning outcomes are that participants who successfully complete the training will:

- Be equipped to receive a disclosure of SVH from a student or staff member in a supportive manner that is safe for both of them.

- Demonstrate critical awareness of organisational culture and how they can act as an agent of change.

- Reflect on how they can contribute to the welfare of community members in their existing role, as a formal or informal 'First Point of Contact', and / or as an advocate and supporter of cultural change.

The goal of providing FPOC training is to support educational institutions and other settings to have sustainable informal disclosure options available to community members. This capacity building has taken place to date largely among staff members but is inclusive of student engagement where possible. In the Higher Education Sector where it has been developed, these efforts support the culture change called for in the 'Safe, Respectful, Supportive & Positive: Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Irish Higher Education Institutions' policy framework (DFHERIS, 2019). FPOC training is founded on protection as one of the four pillars adopted from the Istanbul Convention (McQuigg, 2017) and outlined in the Irish Government's Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. The national strategy recognises the extent of violence committed on women, girls and other vulnerable groups in Irish society. Hence, FPOC training aims to provide a tertiary SVH intervention. By training staff and students who are not specialised in a violence or harassment response role, FPOC aims to mitigate the re-traumatisation of victim-survivors when they disclose an incidence of SVH.

FPOC training incorporates a workbook and reflective journal that are intended to enable participants to recognise and critically reflect on the learning they engage in during the training. Incorporating this learning strategy supports participants in several ways, to:

- Encourage independent learning and support participants to take control of their learning and development.

- Provide a means for participants to order their thoughts and responses in a structured way, and to apply what they have learned to their lived experience.

- Assist participants to achieve 'deeper' as opposed to 'surface' learning.

- Enable the participants to identify their personal strengths and areas for development.

To prepare for the training sessions, participants are asked to complete pre-session material and homework. For example, prior to one session they complete the sexual violence myth questionnaire designed by Galway Rape Crisis Centre. Participants are assured that they will not be asked to disclose their answers to pre-session exercises but are asked to complete this work as part of the engagement and personal reflection that facilitates learning. Participants are also provided with post-session reflection exercises and further reading prompts to enhance their learning on topics covered in the sessions. Following the completion of FPOC training, participants are encouraged to review the ongoing support options available to them in their workplace.

FPOC training delivery models

In-Person at the University of Galway

FPOC training is available to all students and staff of the University of Galway. These training sessions are in-person and information on upcoming training is disseminated via regular emails from the Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. All training sessions take place in the School of Psychology in the university.

Online for Further Education & Training staff members

FPOC training is available to members of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The FET sector comprises a national network of colleges and centres throughout the country, and provide a range of education and training options to anyone over the age of sixteen. For example, FET courses are provided to support apprenticeships, traineeships, Post-Leaving Certificate courses, and community and adult education. These courses and programmes are provided through the 16 regional Education and Training Boards and through providers including such as the SOLAS eCollege. All four sessions of FPOC training for FET cohorts are provided online, disseminated through Active* Consent social media channels and ETB contacts.

Blending learning through the CPD Module "Consent, Sexual Violence and Harassment: Practitioner Skills and Practice"

FPOC training is incorporated in the Active* Consent-led Level 9 CPD micro credential (10 ECTS) accredited through the University of Galway. Module participants engage with the first three sessions of FPOC online. The final session is delivered in-person at the University of Galway. As this particular training is part of a CPD module there is an academic assessment requirement to complete a reflective journal on their training experience.

FPOC training content

Each of the four FPOC training sessions provided over the 12-hour period addresses particular themes and issues relevant to disclosures of SVH. The participants in FPOC training are assumed to be non-specialists who are well-intentioned and open to learning how to support individuals who make a disclosure. The role is described as having boundaries of responsibility; participants learn how to signpost supports and other relevant services, but the main focus of FPOC training content is in preparing the individual to provide a supportive, respectful, and considered interpersonal response to the person who discloses. The training content is summarised below to provide a sense of the experience with which participants engage.

Table 1. First Point of Contact training content.	
Sexual violence, harassment, and consent	Introduction, overview and discussion of the nature of consent, sexual violence and harassment.
Disclosure experiences and responses	Discussion of why a person might not disclose an incident of SVH, including reflection on barriers to disclosure.
Responding to a disclosure	Language and supportive communication strategies used by individuals who are disclosed to, including active listening, empathic resources and boundaries to the FPOC role.
Sexual violence beliefs and biases	Unconscious bias and implicit assumptions concerning SVH, including personal reflection exercises.
Experiential learning	Role plays to acquire practical experience and confidence, practice empathic responses, and reinforce best practices.
The neurobiology of trauma	Learning on physiological and psychological effects that trauma can have on the brain and behaviour.
Vicarious trauma	Vicarious trauma arising from working with traumatised individuals and supportive organisational policies.
Self-care	Supporting participants in their emotional resilience, boundary setting, and personal wellbeing.
Cultural and organisational change	How SVH relates to the culture in their own institution and the policies that are available locally to address bullying, harassment and/or sexual harassment.
The legal framework	An overview of current legislation in Ireland concerning consent, stalking, image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), rape, and sexual assault.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary research question addressed in the evaluation of the First Point of Contact (FPOC) disclosure management skills training programme was to assess whether such training can be provided effectively and in a sustainable manner, while promoting positive culture change on prevention and victim support.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Explore participant experiences of FPOC implementation across education settings (e.g., relevance, impact, efficacy, implementation barriers).

- Identify enhancements to FPOC training and to sustainability actions such as ongoing supervision and peer support.

- Explore adaptation of FPOC with respect to diversity and inclusion.

- Assess FPOC training from an institutional perspective through stakeholder interviews on disclosure training as part of organisational strategy on SVH.

The evaluation took place through a mixed methods research design. This included an online survey of FPOC participants who had completed training. The survey form had quantitative and qualitative components. Focus groups with FPOC participants were subsequently held in person and online. Stakeholder interviews were held in person, supplemented by a brief online survey, and were integrated with a follow up survey of FPOC participants at the University of Galway to support a case study of implementation.

This combination of methods allowed focused data collection that mapped on to the research objectives to be complemented by open-ended,

participant-led discussion using qualitative strategies. Stakeholder interviews were used to address organisational perspectives in particular, which are likely to be important in assessing the sustainability of FPOC training in the future.

Research ethics approval was obtained from the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee. The primary source of funding for the project was through a grant from the Irish Research Council New Foundations (Strand 1a). The project also drew on the staff resources and expertise available through the Active* Consent programme team, which was supported during the period of the evaluation by Lifes2good Foundation, the University of Galway, Rethink Ireland, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science.

Online survey

An online survey was launched in May 2023 for individuals who had completed First Point of Contact training. These individuals were contacted using an email invitation to go to a secure online survey delivered via Qualtrics. The survey form was made available to each cohort of FPOC participants who completed training subsequently until May 2024. Survey completion for this latter cohort of participants typically took place at the final training session.

The survey content presented demographic information first, followed by survey sections that asked participants to respond to statements using a Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree, 5: Strongly Agree). The sections mapped on to the FPOC training process (e.g., "*I would recommend this training to*

colleagues"), FPOC training content (e.g., "*After completing the training I felt prepared to receive a disclosure*"), and participants' experiences with FPOC from an organisational perspective (e.g., "*I have discussed providing disclosure support with my colleagues*").

Those participants who responded to the initial survey launch in May 2023 had already completed the training up to one year previously. We asked them whether they had had anyone disclose SVH to them since the FPOC training and include the analysis of their responses in the survey findings.

Open-ended questions in the online survey provided the participants with the opportunity to provide comments on the training process (e.g., "*Do you have any comments or recommendations on these aspects of the training?*"), the training content (e.g., "*Do you have any suggestions on how FPOC training could be improved in relation to disclosure skills?*"), experiences receiving disclosures since completing FPOC training (e.g., "*How did you cope personally with receiving the disclosure?*"), their experiences since completing FPOC training (e.g., "*Do you have any suggestions on how follow-up support might be improved?*"), and recommendations for the training in general (e.g., "*What would help in making FPOC sustainable at your institution?*").

Focus groups

Individuals who completed the online survey between May-June 2023 were invited to take part in focus groups to further explore their experiences. Information on the focus groups was provided to survey respondents who

expressed an interest in taking part. Focus groups with participants at the University of Galway were held in person while an online format was used for participants not based at the university.

A semi-structured topic guide was created to lead the focus group discussions. The questions in the guide focused on the experience of the training (e.g., "*What was your impression of training?*"), participant feedback on what did or did not work well (e.g., "*What was the atmosphere like?*"), and any recommendations for improving the training or making it more sustainable (e.g., "*Are there any suggestions you would make for enhancing the training?*"). The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis was carried out of the combined focus group and online survey open-ended responses (Byrne, 2022; Braun et al., 2021).

Stakeholder input

Stakeholders at the University of Galway were contacted and invited to take part in an in-person semi-structured interview or to respond to an online open-ended survey. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule and took place in 2024. The open-ended online survey was modelled on the semi-structured interview. The questions focused on the participants' view of how FPOC training could be rolled out effectively and sustainably within their organisation and unit (e.g., "*What supports would you see as necessary to make this programme sustainable within your unit?*"). Interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses were combined. A content analysis was conducted of these responses using NVIVO to organise the process of categorisation and coding.

ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

Demographics

The online survey responses of 154 FPOC training participants were analysed. A large majority (85%) of participants identified as female, followed by those who identified as male, non-binary or non-conforming, and transgender male. Most attended the training as stand alone in-person training at the University of Galway, followed by those who attended the training in an online format as part of a Level 9 CPD module. The remaining participants attended online training provided specifically for the Further Education & Training Sector. The median age of those participants who gave their age (n = 95) was 43 years.

At the time of attending FPOC training, almost half of participants worked in Student Services and other support services (e.g., library, IT department). Academics, research staff and teachers made up over a quarter of participants, with student advocates and other roles (e.g., students, Equality Diversity & Inclusion Office staff, guidance counsellors) making up the remaining participants.

Participants typically heard about FPOC training via email and through word of mouth. A small number of participants found out about the training via social media, networks, committees, or other sources (e.g., their post-primary school, other Active* Consent training attended, a manager). Many participants stated their reason for doing the training was because their professional role put them in regular contact with students, while over half of participants said that they attended out of personal interest. A small number attended due to encouragement from their manager or for other reasons (e.g., that it was important for their role, involvement in facilitating SVH workshops, part of a course or other training).

Nearly four in ten of the participants (39%) indicated that they had no prior relevant experience before taking part in FPOC training. Nearly a third said that receiving disclosures of SVH was part of their professional role, while more than half had previously attended SVH or disclosure seminars or training. A small number had other experience in this area (e.g., worked in area of domestic violence, SPHE / RSE training).

Table 2. Participant demographics (more than one answer was possible for some items).		
Demographics	**Description**	**%**
Age	19 – 29 yrs	24
	30 – 39 yrs	14
	40 – 49 yrs	32
	50 – 65 yrs	30
Gender	Female	85
	Male	10
	Non-binary / gender non-conforming	4
	Transgender male	1
Training location	University of Galway	68
	Further Education & Training sector	12
	Level 9 CPD Module	21
Role / organisation at time of training	Student Services	29
	Other support services (e.g., library, IT)	16
	Academic / Research staff	15
	Teacher	13
	Student Advocate (e.g., SU Officers)	10
	Other Public Sector (e.g., An Garda Síochana)	2
	Other (e.g., students, guidance counsellors)	16
Source of information about training	Email	53
	Word of mouth	27
	Social media	8
	Networks / Committees	6
	Other	18
Reasons for completing training	Having a person-facing job	63
	Personal interest	51
	Encouraged by manager	14
	Other	8
Prior related experience	No formal experience	39
	Part of professional role	29
	Seminar on SVH disclosure	26
	Attended other disclosure training	22
	Seminar on SVH policy	19
	Other	15

Perceptions of the FPOC training process

The vast majority of participants agreed that the FPOC trainers were well prepared and acted professionally throughout, that each of the four training sessions were well-planned, and that the learning outcomes were clear. Participants also indicated that the materials, learning resources, and learning activities used were effective and that the time commitment for training was manageable. Most participants felt supported within the sessions by both the trainers and their fellow participants. Overall, nearly all of the participants that they would recommend this training to colleagues.

Table 3. Survey responses on the First Point of Contact training process (%).					
Response	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Would recommend training to colleagues	90	7	1	-	3
Learning outcomes for training were clear	82	15	1	-	3
The sessions were well-planned	87	10	-	-	3
Trainers were well-prepared and professional	90	6	-	-	4
Felt supported within the training session	88	8	-	-	4
Materials and learning resources were effective	80	16	1	-	3
There was a supportive atmosphere between participants	86	8	1	-	6
Learning activities during training were effective (experiential learning, role plays)	80	14	3	-	4
Timing of sessions / time commitment was manageable	63	26	6	1	4

Perceptions of FPOC training content

Nearly all of the survey participants agreed that the training was effective in covering cultural and organisational change (e.g., challenges, opportunities, processes), diversity and inclusivity (e.g., diversity of cultures, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and disability), and policies in relation to SVH (e.g., reporting, supports, procedures). Highlighting the percentage of participants who chose the 'strongly agree' response, two-thirds (65%) of the participants strongly agreed that the training was effective in covering SVH policies, while half (51%) strongly agreed that the training was effective in covering organisational and cultural change, and four in ten (41%) participants strongly agreed that FPOC training adequately covered inclusion and diversity.

These findings highlight particular strengths of the training and areas where increased emphasis could be given to the design of the training content. The highest level of agreement among survey participants was in response to the statement that FPOC training was effective in covering the skills needed to receive a disclosure of SVH. The vast majority (84%) strongly agreed with this statement while 16% agreed with it. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the participants strongly agreed that they felt prepared to receive a disclosure following the training, with 35% agreeing that they felt prepared.

Half of the participants agreed that the training had brought up difficult issues for them (including 20% who strongly agreed with this statement). This finding highlights the need for having well prepared trainers who have in-depth expertise in the area. Very few participants agreed that they had questions or queries remaining that had not been addressed within the sessions.

Table 4. Survey responses on the FPOC content (%).					
FPOC Training Content	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Training was effective in covering skills for receiving a disclosure of SVH	84	16	1	-	-
After completing the training, I felt prepared to receive a disclosure	63	35	2	-	-
Training was effective in covering policies in relation to SVH (e.g., reporting, supports, procedures etc.)	65	28	6	-	1
Training was effective in covering cultural and organisational change (e.g., challenges, opportunities, etc.)	51	37	9	2	-
Training adequately addressed diversity and inclusion (e.g., cultural, sexual, gender, ethnic, disability)	42	40	15	4	-
The training brought up some difficult issues for me	20	30	24	22	4
I have questions or queries remaining that were not addressed in the training	6	4	15	46	29

To take a closer look at participant sub-groups, a comparison was made of the responses made by participants with no prior formal experience of SVH / disclosure seminars or workshops with those who received disclosures as part of their professional role and those who had previous experience with SVH / disclosure seminars or workshops. There was no difference between these groups in the likelihood of recommending the training to others.

Table 5. Likelihood to recommend FPOC training by participant experience level (%):	
Participants	**Would recommend FPOC to colleagues**
No formal experience	97
Previously attended SVH / disclosure seminar or programme	96
Receives disclosures as part of professional role	95

This observation is reflective of the responses made to the Likert scale questions that evaluated the participants' perceptions and experiences of training. There were few distinctions in satisfaction levels or perceptions of training effectiveness that were linked to the participants' level of prior experience with similar training.

Table 6. Feeling of preparedness by participant experience level (%):	
Participants	**Felt prepared to receive disclosure**
No formal experience	92
Previously attended SVH / disclosure seminar or programme	100
Receives disclosures as part of professional role	95

The largest differences were noted with respect to the percentage of participants who agreed that:

- The training had brought up difficult issues for them (participants with no formal experience: 58%; participants who had at least some prior experience: 44%)

- The training was effective in covering cultural / organisational change (participants with no formal experience: 96%; participants who had at least some prior experience: 83%)

Receiving disclosures after FPOC training

The responses of those participants who had a time gap between completing FPOC training and receiving the survey were analysed to assess their experiences of receiving disclosures of SVH after the training had finished (n = 61). A quarter (24%) of participants said that they had received a disclosure of SVH since completing FPOC training. The majority of these participants indicated that they were disclosed to in the course of their professional role or because they were seeing the person who disclosed in a professional capacity. The remaining participants were disclosed to by a personal acquaintance or for a different reason.

Table 7. Survey participants' experience of receiving disclosures (%; n = 61).		
Received a disclosure	No	76
	Yes	24
Why disclosed to	Part of professional role	46
	Person seeing me in professional capacity	46
	Person was personal acquaintance	15
	Other	8

Participants were asked to indicate which FPOC skills they had used in responding to the disclosure incident that they found most challenging. The participants described providing active listening and mindful communication that consciously uses strategies that they had learned about and practiced (*"active listening and communication skills", "slowing down, sitting with the person and just being. Questions can come later", "I did remember what to say and especially what not to say", "listening without prejudice, remaining calm and helping the young person make appointments for support services"*).

Here one participant draws on the tools they had acquired from training, including using the right terms, understanding what supports were available, and recognising the purpose and boundaries of the FPOC role: *"I had the knowledge of supports and terminology and approach to support the person at that moment in time without taking on the responsibility myself".*

Participants described being calm, not pursuing a particular agenda, and respecting the person's choice to disclose to them. They did not look for specific details and allowed the interaction to unfold, as seen in these examples:

- *I remained calm and allowed the person to allude to the situation before telling me, asking if they would like to go to somewhere more private, making tea and letting them tell me in their own time.*

- *I stayed calm and did not push the person to make a formal report, it was a very casual disclosure and I was wary of validating the person without making them feel more anxious about their experience.*

- *Being exposed to the conversations during training allowed me to stay calm and support the person disclosing in a professional manner.*

In this example we see the participant express a trauma-informed, validating approach with confidence: *"Not asking*

questions, letting them say as much as they want to say, having confidence in my responses to them, letting them know what their options are going forward if they wish to use them, making sure they know I believe them".

The participants were also asked to describe how they coped personally after the disclosure incident that they found most challenging. There were varied responses given, from one person who said they were *"more confident dealing with the disclosure"* to another who shared that: *"I found myself thinking it over and hoping I gave the right support /advice".* This participant seemed to combine both responses, able to feel confident about how they responded but needing to reassurance themselves that they had done a good job: *"Confident and although it still did the rounds in my head a few times after … reassuring myself I had referred and empowered and been safe and useful".* Completing the training and following the process they had learned gave a sense of confidence: *"I felt assured I was following the best possible practice reinforced by FPOC training".*

Participants referred to using informal techniques to cope and move back into their normal life space (e.g., *"had a cuppa and chatted to a close friend"*) as well as availing of strategies directly linked to the training (*"used the buddy system this was very good", "[I] remained calm and made sure I practiced self-care afterwards"*). Participants also described processing significant emotional responses to disclosures (*"let myself cry, be angry, bought myself a meal out and had an early night"*) and experiencing the burden of finding out things that prompted critical reflection (*"the most difficult was that the disclosure was made [about a person I know] and always thought of a nice person"*).

A quarter (24%) of participants said that they had received a disclosure of SVH since completing FPOC training. The majority of these participants indicated that they were disclosed to in the course of their professional role or because they were seeing the person who disclosed in a professional capacity.

Experiences since completing FPOC training

The responses of the sub-set of 61 participants who responded to the survey after some time had elapsed since the training were analysed with respect to whether they had engaged in particular actions. These actions included discussing disclosure support with their colleagues, their manager, and engaging with the trainers or other people who took part in FPOC training.

The responses to these statements were less clear cut than the responses that had been provided to the training process and content survey sections. Most of this group of participants (71%) agreed that they had discussed providing disclosure support with their colleagues, while half (53%) had discussed it with their manager. The large percentage of participants who chose the 'neutral' or 'not applicable' options (15-24%) may have selected these options because they had not as yet discussed disclosure support with their colleagues or managers. The remaining participants (15-24%) were clear that they had not discussed disclosure support.

Thus, some participants were unsupported by colleagues or managers, while others appeared not to have discussed the training in their unit as yet. This suggests that there is scope to support FPOC participants in resolving whether the training was primarily relevant as personal development or if they were open to being a resource in their home unit or organisation.

The next statement on the survey followed on from the initial statement about discussing disclosure support with colleagues. Less than half (44%) of the participants felt supported by their unit or department in providing disclosure support. One-third of the participants (32%) chose the 'neutral' or 'not applicable' response, presumably reflecting those participants who had not discussed their participation in the training. Finally, 22% disagreed that they felt supported in their department or unit, suggesting that they were not satisfied with the support they received. Overall, responses to this statement reflect a significant gap in feeling supported in providing disclosure support. Potentially, this could be addressed by having more participants discuss their training with colleagues or by having a clearer policy framework within which FPOC would operate.

The final three items on this section of the survey referred to support and actions subsequent to training. The responses to these statements indicate that most participants had not engaged with follow up support after the training was completed.

One in five had availed of support or assistance from FPOC trainers, while a similar percentage (19%) had taken part in the Disclosure Support and Working Group for FPOC established in Galway. A small number of participants (8%) had availed of the FPOC training buddy system, which had been trialled with some University of Galway participants. A large percentage of survey participants chose the 'neutral' or 'not applicable' responses to these statements (37-44%), presumably indicating that a number of participants did not have access to these supports. The remaining participants (43-48%) disagreed that they had taken part.

Table 8. Participant experiences since FPOC training (%).

Experience	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have discussed providing disclosure support with my colleagues	33	38	15	11	4
I have discussed providing disclosure support with my manager	27	26	24	20	4
I felt supported by my unit / department in providing disclosure support	18	26	32	16	6
I have availed of support / assistance from the FPOC trainers	9	11	37	27	16
I have taken part in the FPOC Disclosure Support and Working Group	13	6	37	26	19
I have availed of the 'buddy system'	4	4	44	33	15

Taking a closer look at the differences associated with the participants' roles, more than half (56%) of FPOC participants in student support positions felt supported by their unit or department in providing disclosure support. This contrasted with the small number of participants working in teaching, academic or research roles who felt supported in relation to providing disclosure support.

Table 9. Perceptions of unit / department support by participants in differing roles (%).

Role	Felt supported by unit or department in providing disclosure support
Student Services, professional support services and advocates	56
Teachers	14
Academic / research staff	11

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Participants who completed the online survey by June 2023 were given the opportunity to take part in a focus group. Subsequently, eight focus groups were carried out with groups ranging in size from one to six people in each (n=23). Nearly all participants were female, apart from two males and one non-binary participant. Each focus group lasted approximately an hour (range: 54 to 86 minutes). The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis alongside the open-ended qualitative feedback collected in the online survey. The views of participants were categorised under four main following themes and into sub-themes where appropriate.

Table 10. Thematic analysis of focus group and open-ended survey feedback.

Theme	Sub-themes
1: Training Content	Impact of sexual violence myths questionnaire
	Changing perspectives on sexual violence and harassment
	Transferrable soft skills
	Role definition
2: Training Process	Therapeutic facilitators and environment
	Confidence building
	Experiential learning: Challenging but essential
	Embodying the experience of victim-survivors
	Experiential skills practice
	Learning in a mixed group
3: Suggestions for Improving Training	Online or in-person delivery format
	More guidance on role plays
	Information on how to handle perpetrator disclosures
	Clarification on policy issues
	Inclusion and diversity
4: Supports Needed	Peer support and debrief
	Time commitment
	Visibility
	Refresher training and supervision sessions
	Focused recruitment
	Mandatory training
	Personal support from management
	Official, clearly designated roles

Training content

This theme describes what participants found effective about the training content and information that was delivered to them.

Impact of the sexual violence myths questionnaire

Reflection on responses made to sexual violence myths questionnaire was consistently valued by participants. Framed as an opportunity to answer honestly and to discuss the experience within the safe space provided by facilitators, participants described being able to identify myths and biases that they had absorbed, either through their "*family of origin*" as described by a participant in Focus Group 2, or imprinted from the era in which they grew up ("*Growing up in the 80s certainly, I think listening to the messages you would've been given. As a female you know,*" Focus Group 3).

Participants also noted ways in which they might unconsciously reinforce rape myths to others, as illustrated in this quote from this participant who reflected on their child:

But it's that advice when they're going out the door you know when they get to that teenage stage. 'Oh mind yourself' and again that kind of goes back to the victim blaming, […] you've set that in their heads. That if something happens that it's their fault (Focus Group 3)

Introducing these myths about sexual violence to the group required skilful facilitation and support, as the questions could bring up some difficult issues. Some participants found the sexual violence myths questionnaire challenging to complete. For instance, one participant felt "*professional shame*" that he felt reflected on himself: "*I thought I was better than this*" (Focus Group 7).

Another participant was despondent that rape myths were so persistent over time in our society:

Due to the persistence of rape myths that have been in the zeitgeist for years I have to say I really, really struggled with that. Not in that like the rape myths themselves. But I found it crushingly depressing that these were the same rape myths that were propagated when I was in college, which was not bloody today or yesterday (Focus Group 2)

Changing perspectives on sexual violence and harassment

Participants spoke about gaining a new perspective on SVH, which they anticipated would be a lasting change for them. For some, such as one participant in Focus Group 5, this came through increased awareness of how pervasive the issue was ("*It kind of opened my eyes as well to the level of problem that exists in society. I have to say I wasn't aware*"). For others, it was an insight into how the issue of SVH affects different groups in society. A female participant from Focus Group 8 remarked upon getting a fresh insight on the experiences of SVH that men might have: "*I would have adult [males in my family], so I had a real sympathy for them as a result of the training […] I think it just introduces more of a compassionate outlook*". Such changes of perspective were described in lasting terms by a participant from Focus Group 7: "*Once you are through it you are never seeing the world in the same way again. You are kind of done, you have to start changing things*".

Transferrable soft skills

Participants noted and appreciated that the skills learned during training were not just specific to responding to SVH disclosures. They could be applied to a range of scenarios, to "*any kind of abuse*" as noted by a participant from Focus Group 6, and "*to your own life outside of work*" as stated in Focus Group 8. An open-ended survey respondent stated that "*I felt it benefited me on both a personal and professional level. I have learned so much about listening, understanding, caring*". These learnings were described as "*soft skills*" by a participant in Focus Group 7, that is, personal skills that made one more suited to handle disclosures, rather than specific techniques and strategies. The same participant elaborated: "*It's like going into it and being empathic and just listening and not judging somebody is the ultimately most important thing*".

Role definition

One of the key learnings for participants was the understanding of boundaries for someone in a First Point of Contact role, especially seeing the limits of their responsibilities. This introduced helpful and reassuring clarity. Often, this came from defining what someone was expected to know and realising that a person receiving a disclosure did not have to fix everything. A participant from Focus Group 2 described this process in some detail:

> *One of my greatest fears is always that, you know I'm a solution hunter by nature. And I have to stop*

myself from doing that. [...] And very confidence inspiring, in terms of that's not your function. It's not your job. [...] the important thing to do is that you've made them feel comfortable. You've made them feel listened to and you've made them feel safe.

A participant from Focus Group 3 expressed how reassuring it was to be reminded of the bounds of their responsibility. Their quote begins with a sense of their concerns about the role initially, highlighting terms such as "fear", "pressure", and imagining doing a "horrible job": "*The fear of the responsibility and the pressure and like what if I do a horrible job and lead them down the wrong road*". However, their experience of the training was very different; this participant emerged with a clear sense of the boundaries associated with the role. The holding role of the facilitators was important in achieving this perspective:

> *So I think that all the trainers were very skilled and kind of reassuring everyone like well this is as far as you take them. And you know it's only your responsibility to go that far. It wouldn't be ethical if you went any further. So like it kind of took everyone off the hook a bit, something like that.*

The same sentiment was expressed by respondents to the open-ended survey, who emphasised how valuable it was to be reminded that they were not "*therapists or investigators – [you] are there to signpost and support*".

Training process

This theme describes what participants found effective about the delivery and facilitation of FPOC training, as distinct from the content and information that was delivered.

Therapeutic facilitators and environment

The most valued element of the training process was the environment and tone set by what the participants described as highly skilled facilitators. Praise for the facilitators was summarised by a participant from Focus Group 8 in the belief that they were *"very knowledgeable and genuine and caring and concerned. You know offering additional support if you needed [it]"*. This finding again highlights the need for a high level of preparation and professionalism on the part of the facilitators who deliver this form of disclosure skills training.

In the open-ended survey, facilitators were among the most frequently praised elements of the training, with numerous statements describing them as supportive and engaging. The environment created to deliver the training was variously described by a participant from Focus Group 6 as "*safe and on some level vulnerable and informative throughout the entire experience*", which another participant from Focus Group 7 attributed to the demeanour of the facilitators.

Overall, when describing the training environment, participants conveyed a tone of "healing" and being held, which is exemplified in the following anecdote told by a participant from Focus Group 7:

> *The vicarious trauma [section] was a really unifying and lovely healing. We really had a lovely day. There was quite a lot of us, I think twelve of us … and at one point through the vicarious trauma piece we were all crying […] But it was supportive, and it was lovely and it was really kind of unifying as well at the same time.*

Confidence building

A key benefit that many participants took from the training was the feeling of confidence that they could receive a disclosure, a sense of competence separate from the specific skills they acquired. For some, such as this participant from Focus Group 7, confidence arose from having more information on the topic and the feeling that they had "*eventualities covered. So that if someone comes up and asks you a question you are going to have knowledge about it*".

For others, confidence had a more attitudinal basis, in being more comfortable to hold a conversation with a victim-survivor, able to promote an atmosphere of calmness and being well prepared. As a participant from Focus Group 8 stated, *"it's never going to take away the initial shock, I think maybe it might prepare you to be less visibly shocked."* A respondent to the open-ended survey described this as "*allowing the person who is disclosing to take back control and they decide what happens next.*" Another survey respondent stated that they gained the ability to take an "*un-biased approach*" to disclosures, in contrast to the reaction they may have had before training.

This confidence is reflected in survey feedback from those who had handled disclosures since completing training. One person described how they "*stayed calm and did not push the person to make a formal report*" and another felt that they had "*the knowledge of supports and terminology and approach to support the person at that moment in time without taking on the responsibility [themselves]."*

Experiential learning: Challenging but essential

The experiential component of the FPOC training refers to learning by doing. This is represented in the training process through the use of role plays. Two episodes of practical engagement in role play were included in the training. This feature of the process was frequently commented upon by participants. Most often, they would note that role plays were challenging and felt like a high stakes experiences with the potential for personal vulnerability. As a participant from Focus Group 3 described it: "*It's exposing, you're vulnerable, you're afraid of getting it wrong and looking like you don't know what you're doing*". However, these same participants often described how they saw the experiential learning as an essential part of the training. Despite the highly evocative and intense nature of the experience for her, the same participant from Focus Group 3 stated *"I think they are a necessary part*".

The value participants placed on the role plays is reflected in the quantity of references made in the open-ended survey responses, with "*role play*" the most commonly cited phrase in relation to the training. Overall, the use of experiential learning was endorsed even by those who found it challenging. An open-ended survey respondent who described the roleplays as "*daunting at first"* described the benefits of debriefing after the role play as "*really helpful in processing thoughts and feelings around each scenario and role."* This respondent also described how group discussion normalised uncertainties that they were experiencing. A member of Focus Group 5 described this as a process of overcoming discomfort, stating "*when you sit with the discomfort of it and go through it you can absolutely see the benefit*."

Embodying the experience of victim-survivors

One way in which participants described experiential learning as beneficial was through the opportunity to take on the role of a victim-survivor. Participants described this learning experience as emotionally intense. For instance, a participant from Focus Group 3 described how some "*became quite upset [...] they really got into it*", and how taking on the role gave them a small insight into what it would be like to disclose. One participant in Focus Group 7 recalled how a member of their training group, when playing a victim-survivor, felt gripped by the role and discovered that they could not bring themselves to say the word "*rape*", going on to describe the impact as: "*We all found that really, really powerful that it's so hard to say it [...] it really hit us all quite hard.*"

As well as gaining understanding of the difficulties of making a disclosure, participants described how role playing a victim-survivor showed them what a relief it would be to receive a positive reaction to their disclosure. A participant from Focus Group 1 conveyed this empowering change in demeanour using terms including "*open up*", "*supported*", and "*looking up*":

> *As soon as somebody starts to open up and starts listening, and you feel that you're being supported, your body language will automatically [change], you might've been looking at the ground, or you know looking down, and as soon, you might start looking up.*

Experiential skills practice

Aside from practicing the role of the person making a disclosure in the role play exercises that featured in the training, participants appreciated the opportunity to take on the role of receiving a disclosure. This experience, along with the debriefing of the wider group after each role play, enabled greater comfort with disclosure management skills. A member of Focus Group 3 described this as a process of 'settling', to *"settle more into this set of skills."*

A member of Focus Group 2 described how role plays offered a unique *"opportunity to work through, 'My God that's really uncomfortable I didn't know that would be so hard' [...] so that when you go into the real-life situation, you're more prepared. You kind of know it's going to be uncomfortable, and you can kind of say okay I can take a deep breath now because I've practiced this."* Thus, role plays ensured that, upon completing the training, participants felt that they had already handled a disclosure and put their skills into practice.

Learning in a mixed group

Several participants described the value of learning in a combined group of students and staff or in a group comprising staff from different backgrounds. Specifically, participants described the "*dynamic*" energy these diverse groups brought, and the benefit of hearing a range of perspectives. One participant from Focus Group 3 noted: "*Like there was a mixture of staff and students doing it, [...] just the different kind of beliefs that the different ages have if you like [...] even the academics and the admin and we all had a different view.*"

Suggestions for improving training

Aside from the identified strengths of the training process and content, participants made suggestions about how the training could be further enhanced.

Online or in-person delivery format

Participants expressed different views on whether the training worked better when delivered in-person or online. While advantages of in-person training appeared to outweigh disadvantages, potential benefits of training in the online space were also highlighted.

Advocates of an online training format suggested that role plays were easier and felt "safer" online as opposed to having to participate in a room full of people:

> *I found the fact that we were doing the role plays online, in breakaway rooms a lot more of a comfortable setting for me. Because I wasn't having to do it in front of a group. And it was, it really was just me and the other person. Me and the two other people in this small private space (Focus Group 2).*

Similarly, a participant in Focus Group 7 suggested that online training enabled difficult emotions associated with training to be compartmentalised: "*There was a safety in Zoom as well, that I was able to do the horrible you know learnings and then close my computer and walk away from it and all that nasty business is done, go outside.*"

Preferences for in-person training were also expressed. For example, the open-ended survey responses endorsed in-person training. Respondents described online training as "*limiting the experience*" and that it was difficult to "*communicate properly*" online. While some participants who completed the training online found this format beneficial, another online trainee reported that rapport building would have been easier using the in-person format ("*we didn't have the time to develop [relationships], because we were online,*" Focus Group 2). A participant from Focus Group 4 said that role plays would have been much more effective in-person, as this is the context in which disclosures are more likely to occur:

> *Online is great, as we've said, and it serves a purpose. But it doesn't allow that human interaction and that human contact, because for the most part you're going to be disclosed face to face. And you need to be able to read the body language, to respond to the body language as well as the verbal as well. So, it'd be great to have that in face-to-face sessions throughout the country.*

Participants note that a group bond was necessary for experiential learning to be effective, as described by the following participant from Focus Group 2 who felt that this component was depleted in her own session: "*I also hate role plays, I hate doing them myself, I hate running them. I hate them. And I'm not sure; at times I think you need. Sometimes I think a group needs to be warm for them to work [...] we weren't quite warm if that makes sense.*" Overall, given the benefits of the group atmosphere described by participants, the benefits of in-person training appeared to outweigh those of the online format.

More guidance on role plays

A number of focus group and open-ended survey participants expressed a desire for greater direction on role plays. The following quote from a participant in Focus Group 5 illustrates how the uncertainty of where to begin during the role play could have impeded the learning outcomes of the training:

> *And now you're kind of staring at each other awkwardly and that's not exclusive to this training. I've noticed that comes up a lot when role plays are done just in general. That a lot of people are uncomfortable with pretending to be someone else. And talking in that setting. But then once they get past that initial buy in, they'll either kind of speed run it, or they won't go near it at all for fear of being accused of speed running it.*

One alternative suggested would be to have the session facilitators act out a role play as a guiding example: *"Maybe like the first or the second session as homework just because like before we start so people can see ahead of time"* (Focus Group 6). Another option was to provide prompts, described by one open-ended survey respondent as a *"jumping off script"* that would aid in enacting the role play. The idea was also put forward that these role plays should be more directly observed and supported, with one survey respondent saying: *"Ideally you need to have an experienced person to observe to give feedback that is both supportive and informed by experience."*

Information on how to handle perpetrator disclosures

Participants appreciated hearing the perpetrator's perspective in an activity that was included in Session Four of the training. A participant in Focus Group 5 said: *"It definitely brought to light there is another person involved in this."* Further to this, participants expressed interest in gaining more information on how to respond if someone discloses that they had perpetrated an act of SVH. As the following participant from Focus Group 3 said, this would require a different skill set to that employed when responding to victim-survivor disclosures: *"It's wanting to fix it for them. It's wanting to take care of them. But if someone's the perpetrator, how do you sit with that."*

Clarification of policy issues

Some participants noted that compared with the skills covered in the training, culture change had not featured to a great extent (*"I didn't realise that that was going to be part of the conversation,"* Focus Group 6). To remedy this, participants suggested that institutional, local, and national policies related to SVH be discussed during the training: *"There's a way to maybe talk about it throughout each of the sessions somehow or make it more clear at the beginning of the session, like the first session how this is part of the culture change."* Open-ended survey participants frequently requested more information on culture change and on policy as it related to their own institution. One suggestion from the survey was to discuss this in a separate session after the training: *"I think separating this from the initial workshop would be good as I feel this is a separate issue that needs further discussion."*

Inclusion and diversity

Participants noted that the training could benefit from providing more information about responding effectively to diversity in the profile of people who may come forward with a disclosure. For example, one participant in Focus Group 5 noted that "*you could work [LGBTQ+ information] into the general FPOC training anyway as kind of a jargon buster piece [...] here's your language around being a First Point of Contact.*" Similarly, a respondent to the open-ended survey suggested that "*covering LGBT topics would be worth doing in future (why a Queer person may not want to disclose, Homophobia in institutions etc).*"

This approach should be adopted mindfully in the training, as it was suggested that references to men could be perceived as pandering. This sentiment is illustrated in the following quote from a male participant in Focus Group 3:

> *I think there was too much effort put into saying that this happens to everyone. And this happens to men too. And that women do this to men. I mean it is a fact that it mostly happens to women. And it is mostly done by men. And I don't think it's controversial or excluding anyone, or being discriminatory to say that*

This participant goes on to describe how facilitators making too much of an effort to make the men in the room feel comfortable can in fact have the opposite effect:

> *Because it was almost like pandering to the men when there was only like two of us in the in the session! And you know we had no qualms about it being a men's issue that sexual violence is predominantly something that is perpetrated by men. So my advice might be to actually pull back on that a bit.*

The participant then suggested that male participants are capable of situating themselves within the broader cultural context of the issue. For him, open discussion of this may be more productive than simply reiterating that the sexual violence happens to men:

What you can do instead of talking about like it being men, is it being patriarchy. You know that sexual violence is inherently patriarchal. So even when it's perpetrated, it's mostly, that allows you to say it's mostly perpetrated by men. It's mostly perpetrated against women. But even when it's a man who's perpetrating it against a man, or even when it's a woman perpetrating against a man. It's normally because they're coming from a patriarchal view of how sex works.

Supports needed

The participants made a number of suggestions for the supports that would be needed to make FPOC training programme sustainable in the long term. These referred to having a supportive network of peers who are involved in disclosure support, managing the time commitment involved, achieving visibility for the role, establishing standards for refresher training and access to supervision, focused recruitment of people for FPOC training in particular areas of the organisation, making training mandatory, having the support of management, and clarifying the role of FPOC within organisations.

Peer support and debrief

It was frequently suggested that peer support was an important issue to address in achieving a sustainable approach. Access to mutual support and debriefing would be beneficial in providing a sense of solidarity. As one participant in Focus Group 7 stated, "*that level of not feeling alone [which would be] massively healing.*" Several options were put forward for what this may look like. For example, a participant from Focus Group 5 advocated for a broad "*social network*" in which others who had completed the training would be available to communicate with. Another suggestion was for an online platform such as a "*questions and answers form,*" as suggested by an open-ended survey participant. Others spoke about the value of a buddy system, as a participant in Focus Group 8 suggested "*so that if something happened in my office today I could walk down the corridor to another office and go into a colleague and say 'look do you have ten minutes, I just need to run by what I've just heard.'*"

Time commitment

Time commitment was one of the most common obstacles identified by participants. This was referenced with respect to the time required to do the training ("*I think it's the three hours over four weeks is, I genuinely think the most manageable way to do it. But I was aware that's three hours over four weeks, which can be difficult for people,*" Focus Group 5). The prospect of receiving a disclosure was also seen as requiring a time commitment ("*obviously just as with anything you take on additional that managing that with your actual work and home life and everything else, that's difficult,*" Focus Group 7). Participants often expressed a desire for acknowledging the time involved in having a First Point of Contact role in workload allocation models: "*I think that support piece whether that comes, well it needs to come from other people being involved but also you know whether it's hours you have that you can dedicate to that role*" (Focus Group 8).

Visibility

Participants suggested that increasing the visibility of the programme would encourage culture change. For example, a participant in Focus Group 5 suggested that having a distinctive symbol or motif for FPOC would raise visibility ("*symbols or pins that are easily identifiable*"). With regard to making those trained in disclosure more visible, a participant in Focus Group 4 shared her experience of the impact that can be achieved by publicising the role:

> *Once I finished the training, we [communicated] to students … that there is a staff member now who is First Point of Contact on the staff. If anybody feels they would like to*

speak to [them]. Within an hour I had a student come to me, reaching out to speak about her experience. And I've had probably four or five in the space of a couple of months. So it just shows the need for. Like we're a pretty smallish campus.

As well as being popular among focus groups, open-ended survey respondents made similar remarks about increasing awareness of the programme through higher visibility. Suggestions included incorporating a digital badge into email signatures and having posters with QR codes that link to relevant supports and information on training.

However some participants expressed concern at being publicly known in their institution as individuals who could receive disclosures. The following quote from a participant in Focus Group 5 describes conflicting feelings. While the person would feel comfortable supporting students, being visible to staff colleagues as a point of contact made them uncomfortable:

I didn't say 100% yes I'll want to advertise myself to staff. While with students I would be yea I would love to have a sticker on my door. They'd come in and they see that and then they're like okay, right this is someone I can chat to. But I don't know how I'd feel about staff members coming knocking on my door. I don't know.

Other participants, including this member of Focus Group 6 acknowledged the difficulty in finding a balance between making individuals visible to those who needed to disclose while preserving the privacy of FPOCs:

I don't know if it should be publicly put out there, like a list that's very accessible online. I think I struggle with that just because, like I would

want people to be able to find it easily but at the same time I don't want, like [...] I wouldn't want a sticker on my desk being like come talk to me about Sexual Violence.

The same participant also questioned how suitable a public list of FPOCs would be for providing guidance to those who needed to disclose: *"To have just a list of people on the website, like is that really, like who is going to actually go and try to find it that way."*

Refresher training and supervision sessions

The idea of having follow up sessions to refresh the training was a recurring suggestion among survey respondents. Refresher training would allow participants to practice and update their skills, or as the previously quoted participant put it *"to keep it live."* This participant from Focus Group 7 advocated for "*a bite size refresher fairly regularly [...] shorter days more frequently",* while a member of Focus Group 8 asked for a *"booklet or [...] little credit card size card that you slot into your wallet and even if someone had disclosed [...] you can go and look at it and say well did I cover everything."*

As a related point, participants described the importance of having access to group supervision, as suggested by a participant in Focus Group 2:

Maybe once every six weeks, in a group setting [...], where they just have an opportunity even those who haven't say even had a disclosure yet. [...] to keep it supportive and to keep it as an inclusive, but safe space. That kind of ongoing dialogue around it. So as I said even for those who may not have had anything yet. That they, you know that we can talk about it.

Supports needed (continued)

Focused recruitment

One respondent to the open-ended survey described the benefits of offering the training to diverse groups as "*making it everyone's business.*" Participants referenced specific groups who they felt should be targeted for disclosure skills training. Firstly, academic staff should be targeted, "*because they're the ones that are seeing students on a day-to-day basis*" (Focus Group 1). Similarly, security staff and out of hours staff should be targeted because of the higher probability of them being present when something has happened: "*And invariably out of hours that falls to security, you know, you call campus security. [...] many of these incidents unfortunately will occur out of hours. Are we offering them you know, a trained and informed person to disclose to. Or you know to get them to the next stage of help that they need. And I think the answer is no*" (Focus Group 5).

Men were often mentioned as a group to focus on for recruitment due to their being underrepresented in the training. This female participant from Focus Group 2 offered a possible explanation for this pattern of male recruitment:

> *I think men sometimes feel that they have no right to step into this space. And I've had that feedback [...]. Men kind of feel like I don't have the right. Because this is perpetrated mostly by men they sometimes feel I don't have the right to speak. And you know we work off very much the ethos that[...] men need to be invited into this space. You know the male voice is very important in this space.*

Mandatory training

It was suggested in focus groups and by open-ended survey participants that FPOC training should be mandatory within institutions, thereby reducing the risk of a student having a negative experience when making an initial disclosure. This scenario was described by a participant from Focus Group 1: *"We have so many people that are out there working with students. So if you think about the scenario with the student going to the lecturer. Now certainly there's some lecturers I'm afraid to go to … on behalf of a student, you know."* This participant went on to explain that this could be done in a tiered way. For example, a shorter awareness raising programme could be made mandatory. Several participants also expressed that mandating training would increase the scope of the culture change achieved by the training, involving those who were not already interested in the training rather than relying exclusively on self-selected participants who were, as a participant from Focus Group 1 stated, "*already halfway there.*"

One respondent to the open-ended survey suggested that having more *"leaders / line managers / students in positions of responsibility"* complete this or some form of awareness training would increase the potential for culture change. At a structural level, mandating the training might ensure that the number of trained individuals is maintained over time. This participant from Focus Group 2 expressed their concern about lack of continuity should they leave their job: *"I know that if I leave the job, no one else is going to do this. So that's why it's important that it's made mandatory for every member of staff to do this."*

While most comments about mandating training were in favour of the idea, some participants raised negative consequences that could arise. A participant in Focus Group 5 suggested that mandating training would lead to trainees who, having completed it *"under duress,"* might not handle disclosures effectively because they did not buy into the purpose of the training. This participant suggested that mandated participants *"would [do] damage to the overall reputation or ethos of it."* A participant from Focus Group 7 also said that mandating training could make it more challenging to get buy in from management: *"I wouldn't be able to get anyone else to get them on the FPOC training because you have done it, would be the attitude. You have that one person."*

Personal support from management

Participants reported that, in order for significant emotional labour to be sustainable for individuals, those undertaking the training would need support from line managers. An example of what this would look like was provided by a participant from Focus Group 3: *"But it would be a nice thing for anyone that's doing the training that maybe [...] whoever their manager is, [...] has an awareness of what they're going to be doing for the morning. And knows that like to kind of I don't know, just give them maybe an easy ride for the rest of the day. Because it kind of it does stay with you."* There was also a need for management to *"come on board"* (Focus Group 7) and to provide *"top-down encouragement"* (Focus Group 4).

Official, clearly designated roles

A further suggestion was that each department or unit should have a designated person trained to receive disclosures, *"integrated as one of their roles in that management structure"* (Focus Group 4). An alternative to this was to have a rotating role in disclosure management, as suggested by a participant from Focus Group 1: *"You'd almost want somebody to be on call, [...] so supposing there's twenty of us who are and that in one day, one in twenty days."*

These comments, as well as the suggestion of mandating training, speak to an overall desire for as many staff as possible to receive this training, and to have an underlying structure that is clearly designated in the organisation (e.g., *"having one or two people (ideally more) in each department avail of the training - ideally everyone"*, open-ended survey response). One potential benefit of institutional roll out of the First Point of Contact model would be a positive impact for awareness about SVH and consent, increasing the likelihood that victim-survivors would receive appropriate support (e.g., *"the more people that have this type of training then the more likely they will be in spotting signs and assisting those in need"*, open-ended survey respondent).

CASE STUDY OF FPOC IMPLEMENTATION

This section explores the First Point of Contact training from an implementation perspective, taking the University of Galway as a case study. The take up of training throughout the institution is reviewed, supported by engagement with stakeholders and a follow up survey of FPOC participants. Taken together, these sources are used to explore how commitment to providing and taking part in FPOC training can be successfully transformed into a sustainable resource that is successfully integrated into an institutional setting.

The University of Galway has supported the roll out of training to nearly 200 participants over the past three years, characterised by an in-person delivery model. This sustained action has been enabled by partnership between Galway Rape Crisis Centre, the Student Counselling Service, the Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the Active* Consent programme.

Networking meetings and supervisory support have been provided to staff and students who have taken the training at the university. There has been sustained interest in the training among staff groups, with participation by successive Students Union leadership cohorts and recent targeted recruitment of groups such as the University Security Office. At the time of writing, training implementation has continued throughout 2024, with additional plans for training groups into the next year. Over this period, the university revised the institutional policy on sexual

violence and harassment, which is to be launched at the end of 2024. This work has been supported by the appointment of a sexual violence and harassment prevention and response programme coordinator in 2022, followed by a HEA-supported SVH prevention and response manager two years later.

As noted in the online survey and focus group responses collected in 2023 and early 2024, the participants provided positive feedback about the training and mode of delivery. However it was clear from these sources that the transformation from an episode of training into a continuing and recognised role poses additional questions. For example, it appeared that many participants had not spoken to colleagues or their managers about the training. The participants identified the need for access to refresher training and network development, and the status of the role of 'First Point of Contact' required further clarification in the organisational setting.

Engagement in FPOC training throughout the institution

Information was available on the role and location of 157 participants who had taken part in FPOC training at the university up to June 2024. Table 11 illustrates the uptake of FPOC training in the organisational structure of the university across four Colleges, centralised offices and services.

Table 11. Profile of participants in FPOC training at the University of Galway up to June 2024.							
Participant Profile	**College 1**	**College 2**	**College 3**	**College 4**	**Central offices**	**Student leaders**	**Total**
Leadership role	1	-	1	-	5	-	7
Academics	10	4	10	7	-	-	31
Researchers	5	-	1	1	-	-	7
Professional support staff	2	3	7	11	51	-	74
Students	23	1	-	6	-	8	38
Total	**41**	**8**	**19**	**25**	**56**	**8**	**157**

Staff working in Colleges comprised 40% of the total number of participants. There was an equivalent level of staff participation across three of the Colleges, with less representation in the remaining College. A similar percentage of participants (36%) worked in central university offices. Of these participants, two thirds worked in Student Services units, with the remainder equally divided between Human Resources and other university offices or services. Students made up a significant proportion (23%) of the FPOC participants, including eight student leaders from the Students Union.

In terms of the participants' job roles, nearly half (47%) comprised staff members working in professional support roles, followed by academics (20%), staff in a leadership role (i.e., Head of School, Head of Unit) (6%), and researchers (5%). The remainder were students. Twenty-three of the student participants came from one of the four Colleges. By comparison, relatively few students came from the other Colleges (one from College 2, none from College 3, six from College 4).

Overall, there has been a high level of uptake of training across the university, including students, with representation across Colleges, university offices and services. However from the perspective of a staff or student member who wished to engage a First Point of Contact for support, differences in proximity and accessibility can be noted. Relatively few researchers and staff in a leadership role have taken part in training, and differences in the rate of training were noted across the four university Colleges. There has been a concentration of training among staff members in professional support roles, particularly central university offices and services. While a number of students have participated in training, including those in leadership roles, most students were concentrated in one College. This is important context considering that there is obviously a higher turnover rate of students in the university compared with staff members.

Stakeholder engagement

Institutional stakeholders in the university were consulted using an open-ended online survey (n = 5) and in-person interviews (n = 2). Stakeholders had leadership roles in the university in academic life (n = 4) or in administration, professional support and Student Services in the university (n = 3). All bar one had a prior understanding of the First Point of Contact programme, and they typically had some involvement with issues related to consent, sexual violence and harassment. The respondents comprised four male participants and three female respondents. The open-ended survey responses and transcribed interviews were content analysed to categorise the stakeholders' responses into five themes and related sub-themes.

Table 12. Summary of stakeholder themes.	
Theme	**Sub-themes**
Benefits of the FPOC Programme	Culture change
	Individual and organisational competence
Risk Associated with the FPOC Programme	Overburdening staff
	Issues with increase in formal reporting
	Devolving disclosures outside of formal reports and services
Practical Challenges	Lack of hours for staff
	Appropriately monitoring disclosure statistics
	Responding to diversity
Advice and Recommendations	Training more individuals
	Peer-to-peer support network
	Supervision
	Pathways to funding
	FPOC visibility
	Defining role in policy
	Rollout of training
	Recognise and reward
	Refresher course
	Focused recruitment

Benefits of the FPOC programme

The stakeholders highlighted what they saw as the key benefits of the FPOC programme from the vantage point of their role.

Culture change

Stakeholders noted the potential of the FPOC programme to contribute to culture change in their organisation, and more broadly in the Higher Education sector. One stakeholder described how culture change could be two-fold. Not alone might it achieve an impact by supporting attitude change within the organisation (*"contribute to the value of respect, where this traditionally secret disrespect is called out and responded to"*). It could have a further impact through a cascade effect with observable increases in the number of disclosures reported: "*More disclosures that are perceived as being believed and supported, should precipitate more disclosures as those affected will be more confident about coming forward and having what they consider a satisfactory outcome"*.

Individual and organisational competence

The individual competence developed by individuals who taking part in the FPOC training was noted by stakeholders as a benefit. One suggested that it was "*critical that staff are trained in these skills as we need capacity on the ground"* to handle disclosures.

Building on the idea of individuals having greater competence, there could also be a growth in what one stakeholder described as "*organisational competence"*, with other stakeholders also describing how having individuals with competency would increase the organisation's

> **Building on the idea of individuals having greater competence, there could also be a growth in what one stakeholder described as "organisational competence", with other stakeholders also describing how having individuals with competency would increase the organisation's capacity to respond to disclosures.**

capacity to respond to disclosures. This stakeholder went on to define organisational competence as:

> *Not just individualised competence, that becomes an organisational competency because it's so embedded and dispersed across the institution and it becomes a normalised understanding, that there are people who have that expertise, who you can disclose to, that there are different avenues, informal, formal, in terms of complaints and so on.*

Risks associated with the FPOC programme

While stakeholders acknowledged the overall benefits of the FPOC programme they could, when prompted, identify potential risks which might arise from the roll out of training.

Overburdening staff

Stakeholders noted the risk of FPOC participants becoming overburdened with pastoral duties after completing the training. They already have what one stakeholder described as *"many different responsibilities and demands on their time"* through existing roles in the university. Stakeholders expressed concern that this risk would be heightened if the boundaries of FPOC responsibilities were poorly defined. Thus, this stakeholder stated:

Possibly boundaries and I'm not, this is not casting an aspersion on any of those trained but to ensure that there is sufficient clarity of role and expectation [...] to be able to maintain the boundaries around that [...] for the person disclosing and for the person being disclosed to, that there's real clarity around what that person can do [...] and what they can't do.

Issues with increases in formal reporting

Some stakeholders noted the risk that an increase in disclosures could increase formal reports and complaints made through the institution's policy framework. This could stress the current capacity of the formal reporting structures, and potentially result in unsatisfactory outcomes for reporting parties who may feel, as one stakeholder described it that *"'[survivors] told them what happened, but nothing changed'"*. It was also concerning that an increase in reports may lead to the perception that there was an increasing number of SVH incidents at an institution: *"An institution good at receiving / acting on disclosures might appear to have more of this activity than another institution who is not but looks better because it reports less – reputational damage."*

Devolving disclosures outside of formal reports and services

One stakeholder had limited previous experience of disclosure training, and offered insights into challenges that may arise when promoting FPOC training more broadly. For instance, they felt that informal reporting had limited utility, and it was risky to promote this. For them, it was important to escalate disclosures quickly (*"It might better to ensure that all such disclosures are escalated as soon as possible to properly qualified personnel"*), and to avoid any local management of disclosures (*"I think it would be extremely inappropriate to devolve the management of these disclosures to academic units"*).

Difficulties could arise in handling cultural diversity sensitively and appropriately. There is a need to be aware that some religious traditions may have views that challenge current norms in Irish society for personal freedom

Practical challenges

Stakeholders were asked to identify the primary obstacles from a practical standpoint that they would see in rolling out the FPOC programme more widely.

Lack of hours for staff

Similarly to the responses made in focus groups, the most widely reported practical concern among stakeholders was the commitment required for training and in enacting the FPOC role. Thus, stakeholders referred to the level of time off from other duties that would be needed for staff to complete the training (*"the main challenge is making time available for training"),* the time involved in having their own work covered (*"bear in mind that's away from the desk. So someone else has to fill in while that's happening"),* and receiving disclosures after completing the training (*"releasing academic staff involved in pastoral care roles such as this from other duties for example writing academic papers without impeding their promotion opportunities").*

One stakeholder highlighted that staff may need time off to cope after receiving a disclosure and suggested a policy was needed to accommodate this: *"Unsure if policy is in place to support staff/students who have done disclosure training to be relieved of other duties / studies when responding / affected by a disclosure."* This obstacle was seen as significant as colleagues were already time-poor: *"The time I think is the main thing because [...] definitely in our unit, our staff fairly overloaded anyway".*

Appropriately monitoring disclosure statistics

One stakeholder noted that, in order to *"increase the argument and the case for models such as first point of contact training",* data would need to be gathered about rates and patterns of disclosures. This would mean that data on FPOC contacts and disclosure would be recorded systematically. Another benefit of having a method of record keeping of disclosures is that it would allow administrators to *"see those patterns [...] where the prevalence of*

sexual violence and harassment in particular areas or particular units [is higher]", as well as increasing the visibility of groups who prefer informal disclosure routes to formal complaints or reporting.

However, this stakeholder acknowledged that the informality of receiving disclosures is an essential part of the programme, saying *"that you can bring the issue that you want to disclose to somebody and trust that that will be dealt with sensitively."* This raises a challenge to collecting meaningful data without interfering in the process of receiving a disclosure. This stakeholder summarised this challenge as finding the "*balance of accessibility and confidentiality, anonymity and ... trust".*

Responding to diversity

This stakeholder acknowledged that difficulties could arise in handling cultural diversity sensitively and appropriately. They described the need to be aware that some religious traditions may have views that challenge current norms in Irish society for personal freedom (*"There may be significant challenges in communicating these expectations and norms in a culturally sensitive and acceptable way").*

This stakeholder described neurodiversity as another challenge when considering behaviours linked to harassment. They indicated that there is increasing acceptance of the neurodiversity of students and staff, and an awareness that individuals *"might engage in behaviours that are experienced by others as harassment, including sexual harassment".* This posed a challenge and a need to include awareness of neurodiversity in disclosure training (*"training students and staff to identify and evaluate what is a manifestation of neurodiversity or a mental health problem and what is sexual harassment seems to be very challenging to do in a way that is fair to all parties").*

Advice and recommendations

Having identified the potential risks and challenges associated with the FPOC programme, stakeholders were invited to describe what supports could enable these challenges to be overcome. A number of ideas were identified, from training more individuals and providing them with additional support, to securing funding, recognising the FPOC role in practical terms and within policy, and increasing the visibility of FPOC training.

Training more individuals

One support which was noted as being required was to maintain the volume of staff members who engage in FPOC training in order to build the capacity to receive disclosures (e.g., *"I think as many people as possible […] ideally one in every unit"*).

Peer-to-peer support network

Stakeholders highlighted the value of having a network of peers, to mutually debrief and to provide support to one another, to *"[learn] from each other's experiences",* and develop a sense of *"community".*

Supervision

As well as peer-to-peer supports, one stakeholder suggested having qualified persons with whom they can debrief through supervision: *"That's actually quite important to have something there for people that even with the training that have been disclosed to […] the debrief is massive".* They highlighted a need for investment in having these supervisors prepared to a high level (*"[they would be] in counselling to make sure they have the staff there and the time to do it"*).

Pathways to funding

Several pathways were put forward by stakeholders to achieve the goal of sustainable funding. It was suggested

that research is necessary to establish an evidence base on the impact of FPOC training (*"regular review and evaluation of staff training on disclosure should be carried out using both pre-post and long-term follow up … continuing to gather the evidence not just about experiences and prevalence but about reporting, disclosing"*). Additionally, it was recommended that there is a need for a "*joined up and coordinated approach*" across the sector to leverage funding.

Defining role in policy

It was recommended to set out the FPOC role in institutional policy, to ensure role clarity and that people engaged in the role are suitably supported (*"clarity around the role dimensions and the responsibilities and the boundaries"*). This would allow for clear lines of responsibility and reporting to be set out for those who have completed the training, which could become *"embedded in the training as well".*

FPOC visibility

As discussed among focus group participants, stakeholders suggested that the visibility of individuals who have completed the training should be increased among the university community. It was seen as essential by one stakeholder who believed that *"if people aren't aware that the disclosure persons are in place or who to go to, it kind of becomes redundant in itself".* This could include subtle methods

("*Maybe it's an email signature of a lecturer you know who has first point of contact training [...] I can be disclosed to or something like that"*). Another stakeholder, echoing the reservations of some focus group participants about being visible in the role, noted that this would have to be done in *"as sensitive a way as possible",* going on to explain *"you want to make it as natural as possible, but you also want to make people aware that there's someone with this training in the relevant department, that they know who to go to."*

Rollout of training

A number of recommendations were made for how the training could be rolled out more widely across the university. These suggestions included having a trained person in every department, which could be achieved through targeted advertising (*"every time there's a new first point of contact training there's someone from every department being advertised to at least. They mightn't take up on it of course but obviously that department gets a chance"*). Another stakeholder suggested embedding the training in staff induction and went on to suggest that communication around the training is kept brief and accessible, implying a shorter delivery model: *"People simply don't have the time to read essays of information so both the communication about the training and the training need to get to the point faster".*

Recognise and acknowledge

Several stakeholders noted that those who take on the role of receiving disclosures often do so in a voluntary capacity and recommend *"valuing and recognising that contribution, rewarding and supporting it in some way".* For instance, this could be done through acknowledgement in workload allocation

models. Further to recommending that FPOCs be rewarded for their contribution, it was also noted that provision should be made to recognise the handling of disclosures as valued work within the organisation and to *"make provision for same in contracts / policy i.e. releasing academic staff involved in pastoral care roles such as this from other duties ... without impeding their promotion opportunities."* Another stakeholder said that *"it needs investment, it needs to be recognised, and it needs to be incentivised."*

Refresher course

In line with the recommendations of the FPOC participants, stakeholders expressed approval for holding refresher sessions on relevant skills. One particular suggestion was that *"Every twelve months you don't have to do the full training but [...] maybe a standalone session be done for people that have the training but like a refresher course."*

Focused recruitment

One stakeholder echoed the suggestions of focus group participants by suggesting that specific groups should be targeted to receive disclosure management training, including those more likely to come into contact with students. Examples of the groups cited included *"the front facing reception staff, lecturers, tutors even, I mean the tutorials are more widely or heavily attended than the lectures to a large extent [...] you have to look at who students are seeing the most",* and older male staff: *"The older male generation, who have never experienced this sort of stuff before I think that's a cohort that needs to be looked at."*

Follow up survey of FPOC participants

The final contribution to the institutional case study is from the findings of a follow up online survey held with First Point of Contact participants at the University of Galway. An email invitation and reminder were sent to participants in October 2024. This provided the opportunity to update the survey responses reported earlier in this report, to assess the participants' statements about the learning achieved through the training, and explore their subsequent experiences.

The survey was responded to by 34 participants. Most respondents to this survey were professional services support staff (n = 18), followed by academic and research staff (n = 13), and three students. While ten had completed FPOC training in 2021 or 2022, a further ten participants undertook the training in 2023, and 14 participants did so in 2024. Six of these participants had received a disclosure since completing the training.

Following the demographic questions, the survey comprised open-ended questions that explored the participants' perspectives on FPOC and how they saw the role developing in the future. These responses are summarised below as a descriptive analysis. The analysis echoes and extends upon the focus group findings and online survey contributions made earlier by FPOC participants.

When reflecting on the training, in common with the initial online survey, the participants provided positive overall feedback *("very professional, supportive, engaging and realistic training", "comprehensive, in depth, informative", "excellent, thorough, challenging, progressive", "fantastic overview", "informative in a practical way")*. One participant remarked that: *"FPOC training was the best training I have attended within the University to date - a great mix of teaching methods within the classes, and kept engaged throughout",* while another said that *"FPOC was one of the best training experiences I've ever had with University of Galway".*

They went on to describe particular benefits and learning that were acquired as a result of the training:

Becoming well informed

The respondents indicated that they felt more confident about receiving a disclosure and that they had acquired valuable information and skills. With respect to knowledge and information, the participants indicated that they had learned about the prevalence of sexual assaults in the first six weeks of college, that sexual violence and harassment is more widespread than people may otherwise realise, that it is not restricted to gender but affects everyone, people are affected in a variety of ways, and the supports available to survivors.

Excellent trainers

The trainers from Galway Rape Crisis Centre and the University of Galway Student Counselling Service were viewed in a very positive light, with references made to training being very professional and respectful. Constant support was available during situations that were *"heavy"* or *"uncomfortable"* (*"you also feel that you are being 'minded' by the facilitators - they acknowledge that it can be heavy and constantly check in with the group", "if I had been upset or had any issues I could approach any of the members of the staff"*).

Confident after training

Participants described themselves as more confident after the training (*"came away with the confidence that I would know how to respond to a disclosure", "you definitely come away with the feeling that you are much better equipped to receive a disclosure"*). These skills were seen as generalisable (*"you have gained valuable learnings around trauma, its impact, and just generally how to be there for someone at a difficult time", "learned new listening skills for when someone discloses something"*).

Active listening

The survey respondents also referred to specific skills that they had learned from the training. One of the skills referenced consistently was active listening, hearing the person and communicating back to them that they had been heard (*"made me much more aware of listening before speaking", "not to jump into solution mode but to listen calmly and empathically, assure the person disclosing that you believe them", "non-judgemental listening", "active listening, validating the person's feelings"*).

Responding in a trauma-informed way

The participants also described the skill of learning how to respond in a trauma-informed way based on the individual's needs (*"remain calm, to affirm that you heard them and that it shouldn't have happened to them", "respecting the person's decisions about their personal situation"*). This participant described the importance of providing an environment of safety and choice rather than imparting information (*"how little emphasis is on obtaining the facts and how much emphasis should be put on allowing the individual disclosing an opportunity to know their options and feel safe to talk"*). Underlining the practicality of their learning, a number of participants prefaced these comments with *"how to"* statements. Thus, they learned *"how to"*:

- *"Handle disclosures appropriately and discreetly in the best way for the survivor of SV/SH"*

- *"Verbally and practically respond to a disclosure of sexual violence"*

- *"Be supportive and empathetic to a victim"*

- *"Look after myself"*

Maintaining role boundaries

The participants appreciated having a clear sense of the limits and boundaries to being a First Point of Contact (*"my role is just sitting and listening and signposting on", "where / who to direct them to", "it made it clear what my responsibilities would be in such a situation and the limits to what I would be expected to do", "much more secure now, where exactly my responsibilities are (and end!)"*). They referred to not putting any pressure on the person who discloses to take a further step (*"respecting their agency in what to do next"*).

Follow up survey of FPOC participants (continued)

Next, the participants responded to open-ended questions that probed what would be helpful to support people in a FPOC role in the university, the relevant skills and knowledge that they would need, and how they would like to be associated with the FPOC role in the future:

Continued identification with the role

All of the participants who responded to the open-ended survey item on their preferences for the future indicated that they would be happy to be identified within their unit as a First Point of Contact. Some provided additional context on their responses (*"I would like to be identifiable so that I don't have to continually mention it to people especially in other departments that are not my own, in case there is someone looking to disclose but maybe not to someone they know in their own department"*). Some participants mentioned that their role was relevant to being a visible FPOC person (*"it is certainly relevant to my front facing role", "it is very relevant as students need to know there is someone here they can approach", "as I am student facing, unfortunately, I think this will be a life skill as an educator"*).

Visibility of the role

Participants suggested how the role could be made more visible in the institution. Awareness raising suggestions included providing lanyards to FPOC participants, an institutional awareness campaign, and distributing information at School or unit level on who has taken FPOC training so students and staff would know who to go to for support.

Information on supports, procedures, and pathways

The survey respondents described the supports and resources that they recommended for people in a First Point of Contact role. These included information for people in this role (*"list of supports / resources i.e. a reminder of all the options that you can direct someone to", "support pathways that we can share openly with other students and staff"*), and brief resources to prompt and remind them about steps to follow (*"reminder of the steps to follow", "recap of the procedures / obligations", "handout as a reminder of procedures upon receiving a disclosure"*).

Connecting with others

The participants went on to describe wanting to see supports that connect them to other people who have completed FPOC training (*"it's nice to feel that you are part of a community of practice, so regular meet-ups and opportunities to debrief would be welcome"*). This could take the form of a support group enabling a periodic meet up with others who completed the training (*"group meetings at regular/ quarterly intervals maybe", "peer support"*).

Keeping up to date

The term *"update"* appeared frequently in connection with maintaining oneself as informed and knowledgeable in the FPOC role. The participants wanted to have *"up to date information"* and *"updates"* on points including *"laws, changes in practices (if any) in counselling service, SATU", "SVH policies, procedures and supports", "referral pathways, peer / clinical supervision", "statistics - knowing what the culture of consent is like in the university. Is the culture changing?"*.

Refresher training and supervision

As noted in the earlier survey and focus group responses, participants wanted to have refresher training and ongoing supervision provided to them (*"regular supervision, support, refresher training", "refresher training courses to review the training (especially role-plays)"*). This was important to maintain the confidence they felt after training (*"ongoing supervision sessions and maybe short refresher sessions would be useful to maintain confidence in my ability"*). A few survey respondents mentioned the passage of time in relation to the training. This participant referenced that a long period had elapsed since they had taken part, which impacted on their preparedness (*"I thought that the training was very good but it's a long time since I did it and I feel like I haven't had any practice"*).

Participants made suggestions including having refresher training sessions of a few hours each year or biannually. One format suggested was to include review of case scenarios. Refresher training

would be necessary to maintain practical skills (*"as the training took place over a year ago, some of the information has been forgotten already", "refresher training (shortened version of previous version) would be welcome, specifically for those who received training already"*).

Supportive institutional strategy

The survey respondents described several ways in which the FPOC initiative could be maintained in the institutional setting. Thus, one participant emphasised the need for *"communication and buy in from management"* while another wrote that *"embedding this further in the University structures will be a large piece of work but would maximise the programme's effectiveness"*.

Achieving successful adoption of the FPOC role in the institution was seen as being reliant on having clear university procedures (*"a policy on the FPOC role and formal recognition of FPOCs"*). Other participants emphasised the value of dissemination of information on procedures, *"to be shared with all staff, … An actual physical format may also be useful for staff to keep on their desk, walls, staff rooms etc.", or "for [information] to be integrated into generic programmes e.g. orientations, information packs, embedded into some lectures, part of professional development portfolio if not already done".* Finally, this participant wanted to keep informed about how the programme itself is progressing: *"It gives me comfort to see that groups are continuing to participate in the training. Communication about the numbers that have completed the training and from which depts would be of interest too"*.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders and FPOC participants flagged an issue with people who are trained in FPOC finding the time to make an ongoing commitment to such a role given their already busy and pressurised jobs.

First Point of Contact (FPOC) training is a 12-hour psychotherapist-led training, designed to prepare participants to support a person who discloses an experience of sexual violence or harassment. FPOC is grounded in partnership between Galway Rape Crisis Centre with the Active* Consent programme. Using mixed methods, including online surveys, focus groups and a case study, the research evaluation demonstrated participant satisfaction with the training content and process. On completing the training, participants felt well prepared to receive disclosures within the boundaries that had set out, and those who later received disclosures were able to describe their use of FPOC techniques.

The potential for the training programme to be sustainable into the future was supported by several aspects of the research findings. Firstly, the training demonstrated efficacy in enabling participants to meet the learning outcomes it was designed to achieve. Secondly, although relatively time consuming to complete, the participants typically described the commitment required and the demands of the training as manageable. Further to this, individuals who took part tended to state that they would like to continue in the role and have contact information made available.

Overall, the research evaluation study identified that the FPOC programme was successful in areas including:

- Achieving sustained partnership of Galway Rape Crisis Centre, the University of Galway, Active* Consent, and partner networks such as the Further Education & Training sector.

- Attracting sustained interest of participants across a range of backgrounds.

- The delivery model was acceptable to participants, and was flexible to being delivered online and in-person, as a standalone training for groups of mixed backgrounds, as an embedded component of a university-accredited module, and as an offering for participants from a particular background such as FET.

- Allowing participants to learn through experiential learning as well as through discussion, theory and policy.

- The training was valued as a source of knowledge and skills by participants with minimal relevant experience as well as those who had pre-existing experience.

- The delivery was trustworthy and safe, and enabled participants to feel confident in their abilities and preparedness.

- FPOC training was described as providing transferable skills relevant to other areas such as supporting someone who makes a disclosure about their mental health, and in participants' personal lives.

- The training has the capacity to host a unique forum of people across different backgrounds in an institution, from teachers and academics, to students, and professional support staff working in different areas.

Alongside these distinctive strengths and opportunities, the research also identified a broader set of factors to consider when developing a sustainable model for disclosure skills training. For example, the capacity of organisations to manage large increase in rates of formal reporting was questioned by some stakeholders. Moreover, constraints were noted on the availability of specialised staff who can support staff and students affected by SVH. In addition to this, questions were raised about the preparedness of organisational units and departments to respond to informal enquiries. Stakeholders and FPOC participants also flagged an issue with people who are trained in FPOC finding the time to make an ongoing commitment to such a role given their already busy and pressurised jobs.

Sustainability of the FPOC training model

Table 13 integrates the key research findings on continued development of the FPOC training and its sustainability, which provides a basis for the evaluation report recommendations.

There was a clear rationale for maintaining the high standard of training that participants evaluated so positively. Thus, there should be continuing commitment to delivery by specialised FPOC trainers who have psychotherapy qualifications, and to providing a standardised programme of training over the 12-hour duration comprising multiple training sessions. While many participants remarked on the challenge of experiential learning, the use of critical reflection and role play were fundamental to the learning process.

Table 13. Key areas for addressing FPOC sustainability, future potential and risks.				
High standard of training	**Enhancing existing training**	**Sustaining the role**	**Visible and accessible**	**Grounded in the organisation**
Delivered by specialist facilitators	Diversity and intersectionality	Reference material and tips	Targeted, continuing FPOC recruitment	Clarity and boundaries of the FPOC role
Opportunity for critical reflection and experiential learning	Culture change	Refresher training on key skills	FPOC contact information available	Recognition in policy and procedures
Fidelity to standardised delivery and content	Information on policy and procedures	Updates and additional training	Visibility and promotion of the FPOC role	Acknowledged in workload allocation
Commitment to time requirements		Peer support and networking		Monitoring uptake levels by victim-survivors
Ongoing review and research		Group supervision and access to support		Capacity to meet increased reporting

Sustainability would be enhanced by addressing areas to further improve the FPOC training. Participants said the training would be strengthened by increased the coverage of diversity and intersectionality, culture change, and ensuring that clear reference information is presented on the key FPOC skills and on institutional procedures. Once the training was complete, participants would typically like to remain linked into a network of supportive peers. There was a consistent request for refresher training on FPOC skills, the opportunity to extend skills further, and access to regular group supervision.

Following all of these steps, institutional sustainability would involve establishing clear expectations for the FPOC role, aligned to policies and procedures, made visible via a dissemination campaign, and through community access to FPOC contact details. Targeted recruitment would be needed to ensure that there was good coverage across the institution and to relevant groups. There was reference made by participants to having training be required for all staff, however this may incorporate less intensive awareness raising for supporters and stakeholders alongside the FPOC training itself. Mandatory education for all staff would provide a supportive platform for those staff who engage in FPOC training (Alldred & Phipps, 2017). Overall, the participants questioned the ability of their institutions to meet all of these requirements currently. For instance, there was concern over whether institutions could respond to a pattern of increased formal reporting, and whether already busy staff members could incorporate FPOC roles in their workload.

The support of senior management, department heads and colleagues would be needed to make the FPOC role a lasting, sustainable niche with a Higher Education institution – or in any other education or work setting. Nevertheless, the value of the FPOC training was acknowledged by the individuals who took part in the evaluation research. This value extended not only to participants but to building capacity in institutions.

The training model that has been described in this report should be protected in terms of fidelity and further enhanced following participant and stakeholder suggestions. Participants have been receiving informal disclosures, and organisations must choose whether to meet the challenge of systematic implementation. This applies to the spectrum of organisations and education settings, from large Higher Education institutions, to smaller Further Education & Training colleges, and into other settings such as post-primary schools. Nevertheless, as it stands, participants and stakeholders who took part in the research evaluation felt that FPOC training engagement represented a valuable enhancement for individuals and organisations.

Participant satisfaction with FPOC training

FPOC training process

The participants agreed that the FPOC trainers were well prepared and professional, had planned the training sessions well, and made the learning outcomes of each session clear. Participants also felt that the materials, learning resources, and learning activities that were used throughout the training were effective and that the time commitment involved for taking part in the full 12-hour training was manageable.

The role play component of the training provided participants with the opportunity to take part in a mock disclosure situation, an exercise that the participants greatly valued. This exercise allowed participants to use the skills that they had learned – to practice empathic responses to disclosures, to become aware of rape myths and victim blaming and their own unconscious assumptions and bias. These have been noted to be predictors of how an individual might react to a disclosure and which do not feature in all disclosure training programmes (Sears-Greer et al., 2022). Though many participants found the role plays difficult, they also spoke about the advantages, citing the insights they achieved into SVH experiences and the ability to practice their skills.

Participants said that a positive and supportive environment had been created during the training sessions. They felt well supported by the trainers and fellow FPOC training participants. This is an important finding because half of the participants indicated that the training brought up difficult issues for them, and they were asked to engage in role play and critical reflection on their personal

assumptions about consent and SVH. This leads to a state of vulnerability, and yet participants typically agreed that were safe and supported during training. This underscores the importance of having appropriately qualified trainers, given the emphasis placed on vicarious trauma and the importance of self-care (AbiNader et al., 2023; Crivatu et al., 2023).

When asked if they would recommend FPOC training to their colleagues, the vast majority of participants agreed that they would. Further analysis showed that participants who had previous experience with receiving disclosures or had attended other disclosure training or seminars were as likely to recommend FPOC training as participants who had no formal disclosure experience. There appeared to be benefits to FPOC training regardless of whether participants had previously attended other disclosure training seminars or had experience receiving disclosures as part of their professional role. Overall, participants typically agreed that after completing FPOC training, they felt prepared to receive a disclosure of SVH.

FPOC training content

Most participants agreed that taking part in FPOC training provided them with the skills that they required to receive a disclosure of SVH. This was an important outcome of the training because a person's reaction to receiving a disclosure can impact the individual who makes the disclosure (Ahrens, 2006; Orchowski et al., 2013). Participants identified skills that they had acquired during the training, including empathetic responding, active listening, and non-judgemental support. Indeed,

these skills were relevant for being an effective communicator across a range of situations, and illustrate learning achievements that should be highlighted in future FPOC recruitment.

Most FPOC participants agreed that they felt prepared to receive a disclosure of SVH after completing the training. Those with no prior SVH or disclosure training experience were as likely to feel prepared as people who had some previous training experience or who were in a role where disclosures may be made. Thus, the benefits of FPOC participation extended to participant confidence that they could receive a disclosure. Confidence in this context meant the ability to be present and open to receiving a disclosure, alongside possessing the knowledge and relevant information needed to signpost somebody to additional supports.

Suggestions to improve FPOC training

Participants and stakeholders made suggestions and advice about how FPOC training could be further enhanced. At present, FPOC training is provided both in-person and online, depending on a participant's route into the training. Despite support for both online and in-person training, most participants stated a preference for future FPOC training to be provided in-person. Participants felt that online training could limit rapport building, both individually and as a group, which could impact on comfort in completing the role play exercises. Participants felt that face-to-face contact was important to underpin the role play

exercise and was more ecologically valid as they anticipated that disclosures would be made in-person too.

Although the role plays were widely appreciated and seen as important, participants would like future training to have more input and guidance from the trainers on the role play component. Some participants struggle to get the conversation started. The use of a script or prompts to help support the conversation would be appropriate. Participants also sought additional feedback from the trainers on their role play performance to further enhance their learning.

Several suggestions were made for improving FPOC training, which included:

- Incorporating diversity and intersectionality to a greater degree in the training content, to help participants understand the experience and disclosure preferences of members of diverse groups, and how to best respond to these groups in order to meet their needs.

- More information is required in relation to receiving disclosures from a perpetrator of SVH, what such a disclosure might look like, and how best to handle it.

- More information about institutional, local and national SVH-related policies, including a briefing on the procedures associated with reporting, investigations, and the supports available to someone who makes a disclosure.

Limitations

The findings of this research evaluation are caveated by several practical limitations. The self-selection of focus group participants implies a degree of buy-in and support for the training among those who chose to take part. There was a lack of uptake by stakeholders of the open-ended survey and invitation to interview. The stakeholder perspectives provided the basis for an institutional case study, with a need for further consultation to take place with stakeholders in other organisations and settings.

While the FPOC training participants had varied roles and professions, there is a continuing need to expand the range of participation in the training. For example, greater representation of university students is desirable, along with recruitment of more diverse participants – for example with respect to gender, ethnicities, job roles, and social backgrounds. It may be challenging to have widespread of engagement of students in the training, yet disclosures by students are typically made to their peers (Burke et al., 2020). It may be necessary to consider how the training could be adapted to meet the needs of students while continuing to impart skills and knowledge. The CPD module enabled participants with public sector jobs such as An Garda Síochána, the Irish Defence Forces, post-primary teachers, and student advocates such as Student Union Officers to take part. Yet there is considerable scope to explore the applicability of FPOC training to these groups in more detail.

Recommendations

Based on the sustainability model, key recommendations were prepared to guide the future development of the FPOC training:

1. **Maintain the high standard of training in the FPOC delivery model:**
   Training should continue to be provided by specialist facilitators. The time requirement of the training should be maintained to make it feasible to continue emphasising experiential learning and critical reflection. Implementation of the standardised training programme should be monitored to ensure that there is fidelity to the approved content and mode of delivery. Feedback from participants and ongoing engagement with experts and research should be prioritised to ensure that FPOC training is continually enhanced.

2. **Enhance existing training:**
   Areas for improvement in training content and delivery were noted. These included greater coverage of diversity and intersectionality, culture change, disclosures made by perpetrators, and information on policy and procedures related to SVH.

3. **Sustaining the FPOC role**
   The training should be complemented by resources and ongoing support. These include provision of standard reference material that participants can rely on to ground their response in the practice they have been trained to deliver. Refresher training should be provided regularly to people who have completed the training, ensuring that their key FPOC skills and knowledge are maintained. Additional training opportunities should be made available to them as well. Peer support and networking was continually emphasised by training participants as a required follow up to sustain the role, while group supervision and access to specialised support were equally seen as a pillar for sustainability.

4. **Visible and accessible**
   FPOC training should be targeted to ensure that it achieves coverage across an institution. Those people who have completed the training and wish to be identified in the role should have their contact information made available through a method approved and monitored by the institution. The FPOC role should be promoted and visible.

5. **Grounded in the organisation**
   For sustainability, the FPOC role in an institution should be set out clearly and the boundaries to the role ought to be delineated. The role should be recognised in institutional policy and procedures, while recognition of the contribution made in the role should feature in workload allocation models. It is important to monitor levels of informal disclosures made to people trained in FPOC, in an appropriate way that ensures it continues to be the person's choice to make a report or not. Concerns about meeting the needs of an increasing number of people who make a report should be addressed by reviewing the institution's access to specialised supports.

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