

# The Echo

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## Zero rate VAT on newspapers

LIKE many industries, the newspaper business is looking to government for support right now.

This is not just an economic issue, although it is that too, with many thousands of jobs depending on papers and their online offerings.

The public good and the health of democracy are also invested in a thriving newspaper sector.

David Leonhardt, opinion columnist for the New York Times wrote last week about the importance of local newspapers in America and need to support them.

The internet had already grabbed a big share of advertising, he noted, and now with the Covid crisis shrinking the economy, the pressure is even greater.

The fall-off in local news coverage means that “many Americans lack basic information about their communities — like what their mayor, school board, local employers and more are doing.”

Leonhardt says the disappearance of this information has big effects. “Academic research has found that voter turnout and civic engagement tend to decline when newspapers shrink or close.

“Fewer people run for office. Political corruption and polarization rise.”

He went on to quote Joshua Benton, director of the Nieman Journalism Lab, who wrote that “local newspapers are basically little machines that spit out healthier democracies.”

The stakes are just as high here in Ireland. That is why newspapers are asking government for zero rating of VAT, which is currently at 9%.

We are fortunate that the overwhelming majority of our public representatives, legislators and ministers accept it is in the national interest that our newspapers remain viable, providing an objective flow of accurate information as well as criticism backed up by factual research, both in print and online.

Longer term, comprehensive reform of the defamation and libel laws is vital.

Looking round the world, at the attacks on credible media and the promotion of fake news, Irish people can appreciate the value of what we have here.

It is so important to our cohesiveness as a community that we have reliable sources of news and information.

## Invest in third level colleges

AS discussions continue on the arrangements for the Leaving Cert, with another stakeholders meeting due to take place this week, it is important to also keep in mind the future of the higher education colleges, which the vast majority of Leaving Cert students will be aiming to attend.

Micheál Martin, the Fianna Fáil leader, and probably next Taoiseach, has been quoted as indicating that the new cabinet will be selected with a focus on third-level education and ‘essential’ research.

Hopefully, a former Education Minister for three years, Mr Martin will have a deep-seated appreciation of the importance of investment in our universities and all third level colleges.

The lack of funding for them in recent years has been scandalous and it will hurt us hugely both in economic terms and in terms of the quality of education of our graduates. It would be a massive mistake now to allow any further austerity to be imposed on colleges.

Transition Year students at St Angela’s College have had their project ‘Know the No’ shortlisted for the Young Social Innovators of the Year Awards, 2020, within the Relationship and Sexual Health Challenge. Here students tell us about their work

**D**ESPITE the closure of schools, St Angela’s College YSI class students have been working on their project, which focuses on the issue of consent.

The class of the college on St Patrick’s Hill, Cork city, consists of 26 TY students who met three times weekly before the school closures to use their voices to advocate for others.

This encourages the students to be full participants in their education rather than passive observers. YSI nurtures creativity, it ignites arguments, discussions, emotions and it places the students very much as the designers of their own work.

The class are actively working through the lockdown and continuing to explore and promote their project on the topic of consent through their online classroom and social media campaign on Instagram @knowthensac

“These are challenging times, however, we are not letting that put a stop to our work as a YSI group. We are continuing to work on our project and hope to promote the issue of consent further in our online studies”, remarked one Transition Year, YSI student.

YSI is Ireland’s largest social awareness and active citizenship and education programme for teens. Its main goal is to get young people to tackle a social issue they feel passionate about and choose effective actions to help promote and educate others in their community.

At St Angela’s College, we brainstormed suitable social issues to tackle for our project, before eventually agreeing that the topical issue of consent would be an interesting area to explore.

Consent occurs when one person voluntarily agrees to the proposal or desires of another. In Ireland, the age of consent is 17, this is for anyone engaging in any kind of sexual activity. A

really engaging video for students which we used in our promotion is the ‘Tea and Consent’ video which sums up consent perfectly in one clip. <https://youtu.be/pZwvrxVavnQ>

We chose this topic because as a collective we were really passionate about this topic and felt that it was not spoken about enough. We all understood just how important the issue of consent is, and how a lack of education on the topic was potentially dangerous. We wanted to shed more light on the subject by teaching people who may not fully understand it exactly what it means.

The definition of consent is to give permission for something to happen. Through our project we wanted to focus a lot on bringing the message to children in schools, as we believed it was vital that children, teenagers and adults, of all genders, should grow up with the knowledge of how to give consent, and knowing how to identify when consent is given. We also wanted people to be able to talk about consent in an open forum without embarrassment. We wanted it to be a conversation that was able to be brought up openly to break down barriers and get conversations started across all generations and genders.

“I am so glad that I chose to participate in YSI this year at school. The life skills I have learned through doing this module is something that cannot be learnt through textbooks. It has forced us to talk about potentially awkward situations at home and I have learned so much through discussion with adults. I am now more confident when presenting to various year groups and I know how to go about teaching such a sensitive issue to the younger students of our school community”, said another TY student.

To promote this issue within our school community we designated a few key areas around our school campus for our YSI posters,

# Educating fellow students about consent



informing students on the topic of consent and keeping them up to date on the progress of our project. We gave presentations to each year group, changing the language and content to adapt to the different ages we were speaking to. For example, when presenting to the first years in our school, we used age appropriate videos, one of which can be found at <https://youtu.be/1wOqcU79Rh8> - as we weren’t so much focused on sexual consent for this group, we used this video because it taught them about the main concept of the word, and how it applies in everyday life.

The feedback we received from these students was invaluable and assisted us hugely in our research. The majority of our first-year students had never heard of the word consent and found our presentations hugely informative and useful. It was great to be able to start these conversations with our youngest members of our school community, empowering them for the future and making them aware. They felt that many of them who had just been to their first discos had been faced with many awkward situations and weren’t quite sure how to handle it.

They were hugely engaged when listening to older girls talk about their experience in these situations. One first year student remarked that they: “Enjoyed getting ready before the disco but did not enjoy being there and being stuck in awkward situations”.

Giving them practical life skills such as how to say no and when to say no is something that we hope will stay with them for life.

“I am really glad that we chose this topic and feel that it has made the biggest impact on the younger students as they now know what consent is, how to give consent and recognise when consent is given, something I wish I had known in first year”, said a TY student.

We also use social media as a really import-

ant platform for sharing our message. It has been particularly important during the school closures as it allows us to continue to educate and promote our message of awareness around consent even though we are not in our regular school setting. Our instagram account, @knowthensac, has over 200 followers, and almost 30 posts educating readers on the topic of consent.

Every week we have a “Fact Friday”, where a post goes up on our account with the hashtag #factfridaySAC, providing followers with interesting facts surrounding the subject, from quotes to stories about consent. We are actively working on the project and continuing to promote our message.

Our YSI group had been successful in organising a huge conference day at our school for the senior students of our school community, and the neighbouring schools alike, with many guest speakers such as Gardai, health care specialists, and mental health organisations involved and, due to speak about the topic of consent to the students in attendance. This was due to take place on March 31st, however, due to the outbreak of Covid-19, and the recent closure of schools, we, unfortunately, have had to postpone our conference day but continue to work closely with these inspirational speakers to further our studies and plan on hosting the conference as soon as it is safe to do so.

YSI events give many young innovators a great opportunity to advocate and speak out about issues of concern to them as well as a chance to listen to the other teams who are making a difference. Although these times are testing, we are attempting to bring some normality back by continuing to work via our online classrooms, and by promoting our YSI project through our social media page.

“I feel that through participating in YSI I now have a greater sense of maturity. We were given the opportunity to have discussions and make decisions as a class without a teacher being the leader, an invaluable life skill. My knowledge on the topic of consent and sexual relationships had immensely grown and I now have the skills to help me through socially awkward situations. I am now no longer afraid to talk about such a sensitive issue with adults and other students and feel that it is so important to reduce the stigma surrounding the issue,” said another TY student.

These unique events bring the whole community of innovators and educators together. We are all learning to adapt and overcome the obstacles during this frustrating time so that we can continue to spread our message. Stay safe, stay home and stay informed and aware.