

Response to Headline Assessment of Performance Report
conducted by Dr Roddy Flynn, DCU

Shine welcomes the completion of this report on the operations of Headline since its inception in 2006. Shine is supportive of the positive tone of the report. Specific responses are as follows:

1. Shine agrees that the media monitoring operation is conducted on a scale which is disproportionate to the value of the information produced. Shine agrees with the general thrust of the report which is to reduce significantly the volume of media monitoring conducted.
2. In the context of the report recommendations, Shine will develop a monitoring commissioning framework to take account of all forms of media reporting of mental health and suicide including print, national and regional television and radio broadcasts, website activity, social media, ambient media and production activities.
3. Shine proposes that under a revised structure Headline will commission from external sources, specific themed and time bound media activity reports. These reports will be used by Headline to inform media industry training and development.
4. Shine agrees that a framework will be put in place for external monitoring of social media as proposed in the report. As per other monitoring this would be conducted by external bodies commissioned by Headline.
Some clarity of purpose is required for this area to determine precisely what is being monitored since much social media is generated by individuals in the general public arena and news providers. In order to be effective, Headline would have to establish meaningful and workable relationships with social media providers.
The research fails to mention YouTube, Vimeo and Periscope which have been increasingly featured on online articles over the last year. It would be more appropriate for Headline to contact sites directly and try build relationships to ensure trigger warnings can be put on video content along with Irish helpline information, for all those accessing content through Irish IP addresses.
5. Headline will continue to react to poor examples of media reporting by engaging with sources, using media alerts and issuing guidelines and comment, however this will be immediately followed by soliciting of more proactive engagement to establish and embed more positive practice in the long term. Arrangements may have to be made for out of hours responses if required.

6. Shine is pleased that there is an overall widespread and unprompted familiarity with the work of Headline and the presence of media guidelines. Shine notes that there are presently several sets of guidelines. It is proposed that Headline will work to improve and establish one set of national guidelines for reporting of suicide and mental health matters for all media.
7. Shine will continue to organise Media Awards under a much more robust and competitive structure as a symbolic and practical response to good practice.
8. Shine acknowledges the work done by Headline and reflected in this report on the education of the media on mental health and suicide prevention related matters. In response, Shine proposes that Headline will restructure its activities to provide two levels of education and support to the media industry.
 - a. The first level will be the continued contribution to all national institutions involved in journalistic and media education. This particular project will involve widening and deepening the relationship with colleges so that additional curriculum time is devoted to the issues of mental health and suicide prevention reporting.
 - b. The second level will be the development of a support and education consultancy to serve all existing media in Ireland (print, broadcast, social media etc). This programme will be a proactive and structured advisory and support which should be delivered by mutual agreement to specific teams within the media. For example, news teams, documentary makers, production companies, sub editors, journalists etc.

Summary

The revamping of Headline activities will invert the present structure whereby media education at student and industry level will absorb a larger proportion of the resources available to Headline.

Media monitoring, commissioned by Headline will be occasional and conducted by external agencies and will absorb less resources than before. The overall intent is to reshape Headline primarily as a media, education and support resource rather than media monitoring.

The above is contingent on:

- a) retaining the existing resources available to Headline although budgets will be restructured to reflect the changes.
- b) reviewing the skillsets required for this new function and ensuring these are in place.
- c) setting out a project plan for this change which should commence as soon as possible with a view to full implementation and relaunching of Headline early in 2018.

Such a relaunch will retain the Headline brand but involve a reorientation away from monitoring towards support and development of media activity in the areas of mental health and suicide prevention.

d) The project plan will be implemented by Shine using existing resources. An advisory group composed of the Project Leader, A NOSP representative and an agreed media expert will oversee the implementation.

Conclusion:

Shine welcomes the opportunity to undertake this revamp of Headline and to transition away from a predominant monitoring model to one of support, training and development. Shine is of the view that the public and media climate in Ireland is such that there is now a widespread acceptance of the importance of open reportage and discussion of mental health and suicide related matters in all media and that there should exist a vehicle such as Headline to support on-going positive development.

John Saunders

1st August 2017