

## **Sexual Violence: Challenges in Changing Campus Culture**

### *Introduction*

This chapter provides an overview of our research which focuses on tackling sexual violence within UK Universities. In this research, we consider sexual violence and misconduct as involving any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, where there is an absence of consent. For example, behaviours can include rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, coercive and controlling behaviour. This can be between students, staff and students, or between staff within universities. Our work provides an essential insight into areas such as experiences of sexual violence and harassment within UK Universities, report and support seeking behaviour, key recommendations for practice and an evaluation of how we have embedded consent conversations into university curricula. In 2016, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) released Catalyst funding for 63 projects and initiatives, to address sexual violence on UK campuses. As part of this, we conducted a mixed-method, cross-disciplinary body of research to review existing practices and policies in this area, developing student partnerships and providing an evidence base of these issues. The use of these approaches allowed us to innovatively triangulate the perceptions of sexual violence on UK campuses by university managers, staff and students, providing much-needed, in-depth and new insights into sexual violence perceptions, experiences, support-seeking knowledge and reporting preferences. In this chapter, we consider the prevalence of sexual violence within UK Universities, as well as the legal implications and in-depth perceptions from students, staff and university managers, which is rarely the focus of work in this area. Based on these findings, we suggest that active, campus-wide campaigns increase awareness, but explain how changing the culture will not be possible if universities do not address barriers to disclosure or have inadequate policies and procedures in place. We also provide key recommendations for practice should be adopted by decision makers in this area. We argue that sexual violence is a

pressing, prevalent issue, but within under-resourced and changing Higher Education landscapes, will remain a low priority without joined up, campus-wide approach, driven by university managers, to embed long-term, cultural change.

### *Sexual Violence is Prevalent within UK Universities*

Sexual violence on university campuses is a global, longstanding and widespread issue, with far-reaching detrimental impacts, for example, impacting student health, wellbeing and academic achievement (Association of American Universities, 2015; National Union of Students (NUS), 2010; Towl, 2016; UUK Taskforce, 2016). Unfortunately, as reports of drink spiking have further highlighted, many women do not feel safe on a night out (Hill & Towl, 2021). According to our work, these experiences are replicated within university contexts and students often report that verbal and physical harassment are part of a normal night out, with many also experiencing derogatory comments or images shared online without their consent. This has been associated with misogynistic banter and lad culture which, it has been claimed, are prevalent within university culture (NUS 2010; NUS 2014; Hill et al., *in review*). Coupled with longstanding, embedded norms, sexual violence is a complex issue and widespread cultural change is required to address these issues.

While sexual violence and harassment are major concerns and have a higher profile in universities and colleges within the US, these issues are just as prevalent and widespread within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Lewis et al., 2016; NUS, 2010; Phipps and Smith, 2012; Phipps and Young, 2013). However, it is only within the last decade or so that research has highlighted the widespread scale of the issue within UK HEIs. While action taken in UK HEIs has been long overdue and gradual, much progress has been made in the last few years. For example, pockets of good practice, recommendations and guidance have recently been collated and have provided important insights (Public Health, 2016; Universities UK (UUK),

2016; Office for Students (OFS) 2021). However, there remains discrepancy in action taken, variation in practice and long-term, sector-wide evaluation of work in this area can be limited (Humphreys and Towl, 2020; Crofts et al., 2018).

Our own research supports the unfortunate prevalence highlighted above. For example, in a short-answer, mixed-method online survey distributed to students within a centrally located English university, 25.73% of all students we surveyed (N = 171) had experienced unwelcome sexual advances, unwanted sexual touching or groping (Hill and Crofts, 2020). However, even more of our sample, 60.82% of students, were bystanders often witnessing these incidents happening to others. This included observing sexual comments (32.75%), verbal harassment (23.39%) and group intimidation (16.37%) directed to others. One element key to achieving cultural change is having accurate information about prevalence. However, universities continue to not have appropriate mechanisms in place to collect this data or lack dedicated reporting processes (Humphreys and Towl, 2020; Crofts et al., 2018). While local police data can be useful, universities must take ownership in collecting their own data to understand the true scale of these issues. This is particularly important as the under-reporting of these issues, particularly to external bodies, also means that prevalence is also likely to be higher than reported.

Importantly, due to normative university cultures, when describing the prevalence of sexual violence on university campuses, students responding to our open-ended qualitative survey questions explained that unwanted touching or harassment as a student ‘is simply a part of life’ (Hill and Crofts, 2020). Other students appeared to hold these perspectives in place, explaining that their peers should not ‘overreact’ and report these behaviours, as sexual comments, touching and sharing images online were often ‘just jokes’. This normalisation of sexual violence within both face to face and online university contexts was further highlighted as some

students explained these were ‘not important issues’ for universities to be focusing on and ‘there are more serious issues to be dealt with’. For students, the police would be even less interested with these issues, as one explained: ‘when you are in a club and someone is inappropriate, you are not going to call the police’. The suggestion that comments are just ‘banter’ and should not be reported not only normalises sexual violence, but further prevents changes to university culture, reducing the likelihood of students from reporting or seeking support.

In one of our studies, involving qualitative focus groups and interviews with staff, students and University Managers (UMs), (including Deans, Directors and Vice Chancellors, for example) it appears there may exist a disjunction between perceptions of prevalence (Crofts et al., 2018; Hill et al., *in review*). For example, despite the high number of occurrences and harrowing experiences reported by students, some UMs in our research appeared more concerned about creating a false impression of sexual violence prevalence on their campuses:

“Well I’d like to see the evidence that it’s even happening... I’m not convinced that it is...without sounding complacent... I’d be reluctant to sort of start putting a whole bunch of bureaucratic machinery in place for a problem that don’t exist or is marginal.”  
(University Manager)

Two thirds of UMs in our research did not feel sexual violence was an issue at their university. When asked why, some UMs articulated that universities were different to the ‘outside world’ possibly suggesting that, as more enlightened and tolerant places, there was less of a problem with sexual violence and harassment in campus environments:

“I’ve worked in factories and transport and retail, you know, where there’s a constant stream of abuse.... whereas in universities, I’ve never seen anything approaching what it’s like in the so-called real world outside.” (University Manager)

Worryingly, sometimes the ‘blame’ for these incidents was located with the victim, for ‘misinterpreting’ the situation. The connection between victim blaming and the problematic conception of the ‘ideal victim’ must always be addressed, as this holds victim blaming in place and further suggests a victim’s own sexualised behaviour or appearance, for example, could encourage sexual violence against them (Roberts, Donovan & Durey, 2019). Research suggests rape victims tend to be viewed as more promiscuous, particularly by males who can view male perpetrators as less culpable (Donovan, 2007). Such issues continue to deny women the agency to make choices about how they respond to sexual violence, which will be discussed further on in this chapter.

When considering perpetrators, findings suggested narratives focused on the ‘type’ of students who would engage in these behaviours. Some UMs suggested that a perceived increase in the level of violence was due to an increase in Black or other racially minoritised students, as well as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds:

“We have more BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] students now than we did 25 years ago, we draw students from a wider area, I think there are more incidences of violence and that some of those arise from students from quite deprived backgrounds joining the university.” (University Manager)

As has been suggested in existing work, this perpetuates racist rape myths, such as the stereotype of black males as sexual predators, as well as attributions toward rape victims (Donovan, 2007). Such stereotypes and racist attitudes might further explain why action in this area might have been limited, but must be addressed.

### *Legal Implications of Inadequate Action*

The delay in UK HEIs taking action to tackle sexual violence on campus has been related to a number of complex reasons. For example, the potential suppression or under-reporting of incidents may be due to reputation preservation in ever competitive and UK HE landscapes, or because UK HEIs have, what they believe are, more pressing priorities (Lewis et al., 2016; Phipps and Young, 2013; Smith and Freyd, 2013; Towl, 2016; Hill and Crofts, 2020; Humphreys and Towl, 2020). Due to the competition between neoliberal institutions, it is argued that there is a tendency for HEIs to ‘institutionally airbrush’ the impact of sexual violence and disclosures to protect their reputations (Phipps, 2020). Tensions between institutional responsibilities, duty of care, and self-preservation may explain why adequate action has not yet been taken sector wide. As already discussed, this is also likely to be due to wider social attitudes towards sexual violence and violence against women which is replicated within universities. Furthermore, the combined restructuring and centralisation of university services, including a reduction in external support services and charity funding further prevents victims from seeking support, as the visibility and availability of these resources becomes more limited (Hill and Crofts, 2020). Not only does this further undermine offences and increase barriers to reporting, but such inaction also contributes to a culture of complacency. It may also re-traumatise and increase suffering of victims by failing to investigate, or by pushing matters externally for the police to investigate if no internal policies, procedures and resources exist.

It is absolutely essential that universities act to tackle these issues, aiming to change such attitudes and norms embedded within the fabric of campus culture. Work in this area must also be adequately resourced with appropriate processes in place to collect prevalence data. Universities not only have a duty to provide safe and positive university experiences for their students, but are important sites for taking preventative action. Importantly, taking action must be a necessary step to protect students over University reputations. As a public authority, universities should be proactive in promoting gender equality (under the Public Sector Equality

Duty s149 Equality Act 2010) and protect university staff and students from discrimination and harassment based on sex (in relation to the Equality Act 2010). When dealing with student misconduct, universities often refer to the so-called Zellick guidelines (formerly The Final Report of the Task Force on Student Disciplinary Procedures) produced in 1994, which provides advice on handling circumstances where a student's alleged misconduct may also constitute a criminal offence. The guidelines were introduced to provide clarity on how universities should respond to allegations of sexual misconduct and what action must be taken, including when to suspend students. However, it has been questioned as to whether they are fit for purpose (NUS, 2015).

In October 2016, Universities UK published new guidance for HEIs on how to handle alleged student misconduct which may also constitute a criminal offence (UUK Taskforce, 2016). The guidance states that the enforcement of disciplinary actions and the handling of student misconduct should be dealt with in a contractual context, given that students are recognised as consumers under the Consumer Rights Act 2015. The report advises that institutions should publish a code of conduct (in accordance with further recommendations from the report), and a disciplinary procedure. There are various legal obligations a university has to adhere to in relation to its students. For example, the institution must exercise a duty of care, perform various contractual obligations, and abide by the principles of natural justice. These duties and obligations must also comply with equality and human rights laws. Despite the publication of new minimum standards, which shall be discussed further on in this chapter (OFS, 2021), it remains unclear how UK HEIs adhere to legal obligations in relation to its students, such as exercising a duty of care and balancing the rights and interests of students in cases where allegations are made by one student against another.

We suggest that there is a gap between the requirements of the law and HEI policies and procedures to address sexual violence (Crofts and Hill, *in review*). This has been demonstrated by the absence of appropriate and effective policies and procedures, accompanied by a lack of action and prioritisation to address sexual violence and harassment (Crofts et al., 2018; Humphreys and Towl, 2020). The impact of this is that there are potential breaches in the adherence to the legal requirements.

In our research, while some UMs acknowledged that there was a problem in relation to sexual violence and harassment on their campuses, the extent of the issue appears largely underestimated, or that there were other matters more pressing (Crofts et al., 2018; Hill et al., *in review*). For example, a focus is instead on drug offences and other criminal offences on campus. If university managers fail to acknowledge the extent of the problem, or believe that there are other priorities, but they are key to driving forward the equality agenda, how can the institution demonstrate that it is having due regard for the need to eliminate harassment on the basis of sex? How can an institution be proactive in eliminating discrimination where it fails to recognise the extent of problem? It is therefore surmised that UM perceptions may be a significant factor in there being a gap between the requirements of the law under s149 EA 2010 and the implementation of it. Additionally, institutions could potentially be in breach of their human rights obligations. A lack of adequate policies and procedures means there may be a failure to ensure that survivors are properly protected and have avenues for redress. There is also likely to be a failure to balance the rights and interests of both parties in cases where allegations are made by one student against another. UK universities must take action and this action must be consistent, governed, sector-wide and regulated.

*Active Campus-Wide Campaigns Increase Awareness*

Some UK universities have implemented prevention interventions or awareness raising campaigns. For example, bystander intervention workshops, or week-long consent-related initiatives provide information about consent, healthy relationships and support services. Such approaches can be effective in increasing knowledge about support or reporting procedures, without focusing explicitly on sexual violence, instead focusing on building respectful and active campus communities (Hill and Crofts 2020). Consent-focused initiatives are also important because young people have difficulty negotiating consent (Hill and Crofts, 2020; Phipps and Smith, 2012; Phipps and Young 2013).

While consent-related initiatives can help change the normative culture, impacting negative normative behaviours, attributions and harmful stereotypes, they can be viewed by students as an add-on and poorly attended, unless embedded into the university-curricula. Our own work has focused on implementing and evaluating consent-related initiatives embedded into university curricula (Hill and Crofts, 2020). For example, students attended sessions as part of their usual timetabled classes, or in other subjects, on topics such as: legal implications of an absence of consent (Law), bystander intervention (Psychology), historic crimes (History) and depiction of sexual violence in films (Media). Students found sessions focused on the legal aspects of consent and bystander training particularly useful, in both recognising what has happened and then knowing how to take action:

“You know what, when someone asked me previously if I was ever sexually harassed or assaulted I would say no, but now [after this class], I’ve had a comment made to me. I found that as sexual harassment.” (Female, student)

Staff feedback for these curricula-embedded consent initiatives was also extremely positive. These sessions allowed tutors to tackle sensitive issues without explicitly focusing on sexual violence, while creatively embedding consent conversations into existing curricula. University

lecturers enjoyed integrating these topics into their classes and having the flexibility to test out new teaching techniques, including technology-enhanced learning (e.g., anonymous live class surveys). However, staff did notice a drop in normal attendance during these weeks, as some students did not see the sessions as ‘relevant to them’ and separate to their usual classes. This further highlights the importance of embedding consent conversations into wider University life and ensuring content is viewed as an ongoing, important part of the existing curricula.

As young people view consent as complex and multi-layered, staff and students also felt that short term, week-long initiatives may not be enough to unpack these understandings:

“Consent week, like that’s effective but I think it needs to be constant and throughout the year, like not just at the start of Fresher’s either, people need to be like reminded of these things.” (Female, student)

Consent related initiatives help raise awareness, but consent conversations must also be situated within wider campus life (Hill and Crofts, 2020). Short-term prevention initiatives or campaigns potentially suggest these issues are ‘only important for that one week’. Ongoing work in this area at universities is essential, for example, running targeted campaigns within Open Days, Fresher’s Weeks, Personal Tutorials, taught sessions and social events.

Academic staff lecturers also voiced concerns over the amount of preparation required for such events and the lack of resources available. Staff recognised these initiatives can be resource intensive, particularly as line managers did not always recognise them as a workload activity, unless they took place as part of usual classes:

“I don’t think we do much of this [at university], again I think just because we haven’t got anybody who would really lead on that sort of thing.” (Female, staff)

As staff were from different subject areas, manager support, resources and practices also varied. For example, some staff felt programmes were too tightly packed to add additional content, or were unsure how to justify changing class content to module or programme leads.

Importantly, while raising awareness about these issues, appropriate policies, support and other mechanisms must be in place to support reporting and disclosures, which will increase as awareness is raised. This must include appropriate policies and processes, which map every possible route of support for students. Our review of existing policies and procedures in this area suggested these may not always exist, or they may not be in a format that is accessible for staff and students (Crofts et al., 2018). The Office for Students have also pressed UK HEIs to urgently review their sexual misconduct and harassment policies, finding many of these to be inadequate (OfS, 2021).

#### *Universities Must Address Barriers to Disclosure*

While putting adequate policies and procedures in place may help to change the culture, this may not be enough. Non-reporting is further normalised through limited knowledge of available support services and inaccessible or limited reporting mechanisms at UK HEIs (Hill and Crofts, 2020). Furthermore, as will be discussed, a culture of not-believing, reporting stigma, uncertainties about how to report and limited faith in university reporting processes appear to force students to individualise responses to sexual violence and harassment. This leads many to manage these issues alone through self-protection and resistance, or justify non-disclosure.

In our research, most students who experienced sexual violence or harassment did not know where to seek advice (64.91%) and some did not know where to report (14.04%). Many felt unwelcome sexual advances should be reported to relevant university support services (48.54%), the Students' Union (29.82%) and the police (26.32%). When asked about other

disclosure routes, students would most commonly report or seek advice from their ‘personal tutor’, an assigned pastoral member of staff, or a ‘trusted tutor’. While internal support structures were often mentioned (e.g. Students’ Union, residential teams, support services, student helpdesk), surprisingly, few students were familiar with external organisations, charities or other university support services. Others would seek help from their friends or would browse the internet to look for advice.

In explaining why students might not report incidents experienced themselves, or those they observed directed at others, students individualised their responses, referring to their own self-management skills, the stigma of reporting and safety concerns. For example, many students did not see the need to report because they felt that they possessed the skills to manage if this happened to them. As one female student explained, if someone groped them: ‘I can deal with it’, another added they would ‘deal with it my own way’. However, for some of these students it would ‘depend on the severity’ and many distinguished between ‘proper rape’, which they would seek support for, compared to unwanted sexual comments or harassment, which are ‘only words being said’. This suggests that the low rates for reporting sexual violence may be further impeded by a perceived hierarchy of severity, as students only reported certain types of sexual assault, such as physical violence. This, coupled with individualised, self-management strategies for self-preservation or resistance, further reflects a normalisation of experiences of sexual violence victimisation, which many students believed replaces the need to report.

A separate sub-group of students in our research did not feel they could draw upon self-management skills, feeling they did not have the ‘knowledge’ or ‘confidence’ to protect themselves or report these incidents. These students had collective concerns, for example, fearing negative connotations of and stigma of reporting. While students were aware they would be protecting both themselves and others by reporting, they did not want to be judged

by others in this way. Seeking help required ‘owning up’ to and ‘facing’ the issue, as one female student explained: ‘I would not want to turn it into a big deal’. Others explained that it was ‘too stressful’ to have to recount or relive what had happened, and many would ‘feel embarrassed’, or ‘silly reporting it’ due to the stigma attached to such behaviours. For these students, their concerns over the stigma of reporting, coupled with the uncertainty of what would happen once they did, further impeded their intentions to disclose. Worryingly, in many cases, this involved a fear of repercussions from others as ‘it might make the problem worse’. One female student added: ‘I would be scared I’d become a target’ by the perpetrator or others. This ‘fear of backlash’ and potential threat to personal safety appeared to be a common theme within student narratives, which many described preventing them from speaking out. This has also been widely documented within other published literature (e.g. Ghani & Towl, 2017, Humphreys & Towl, 2020).

Students also described external influences which prevented them from reporting, which they had less control over. This included issues with existing reporting mechanisms and the normative nature of sexual violence at UK universities. For most students, there was a genuine lack of knowledge about how these incidents were handled. Many students did not ‘know how’ or were ‘unaware of where to go or who to speak to’ in order to report or obtain support. Many also described their loss of faith toward their institution. Reporting was viewed as a ‘waste of time’, whilst others assumed the university was ‘powerless’ to do anything. As one female student explained: ‘no point, as nothing would be done’, another added that, even if students do report, ‘I don’t think anything would happen as a result of it’, as ‘most people get away with it’. Fostering a culture of believing and autonomy in decision making processes will be key, while strengthening the voice of those impacted throughout complaints procedures. This is particularly important as a gap appears to exist between what should happen when complaints

are made and the realities of these processes (Ahmed, 2021). Trust for institutions within the wider student body will only be built as universities are seen to be taking appropriate action.

*Adequate Policies and Processes must be in place*

The issue of not knowing where to access advice and support did not just affect students. In our research, interviewed academic and professional services staff (N=13) were also unaware of their university's policies and procedures when it came to advising students what steps they could take and where to access support:

“I don't know the formal processes because no one's ever told me. These are things that I've done myself within our team to best support the student.” (Female, staff).

Staff were also unclear about what training there was available to them. Many felt unable to adequately support their personal tutees or other students who disclosed sexual assault, violence or related incidents to them. As the preferred contact method, many staff Personal Tutors, felt pressured to deal with disclosures without necessary training or support:

“For us to be able to inform students about the right direction, the right facilities available... to support them, if they raised any of these things... we need to be trained, not every academic can support and give the information to students...personal tutors [need] to know how to deal with these sensitive situations with the students.” (Female, staff)

This had become more challenging due to the centralisation of support services and rise in number of sexual violence disclosures. Students, while feeling supported by tutors, strongly recommended that specialised, trained staff who sat outside of their existing academic pastoral support were introduced to deal with disclosures and that Personal Tutors could signpost students to these.

Staff and students often mentioned that dedicated policies and processes did not exist, or were inaccessible, which further impeded vital support opportunities. Many disclosures appeared to be dealt with through staff grievance policies, local knowledge or informal routes, such as staff discussions. In contrast, University Managers (UMs) were confident many processes were in place to tackle these issues:

“If someone comes up and makes a complaint about another student’s behaviour towards them...the process in place is that it will be investigated, again we have internal processes for investigation. Similarly with staff, we have internal processes for complaints about sexual misconduct.” (University Manager)

However, unless directly involved in developing these, many UMs appeared to not be able to identify those that were specifically for sexual violence. Some UMs spoke honestly about their detachment to existing policies, reporting procedures and how the limited training to support their staff worried them. Additionally, many discussed how their own reporting experiences were often informal, long-winded, confusing and involved a range of different services. This highlighted an important distance between their role and that of student facing staff, with the need for a clear outline of processes:

“I think I’m a bit distanced from that if I’m being honest, I think it would only really come to my attention if it was being escalated... I suspect what I would call... frontline academic staff, there may be a number of disclosures made to them that they may be responding to, dealing with, referring on, giving advice...There would be some disquiet for me about that in that a) I wouldn’t necessarily know what the extent of this type of behaviour is or how many disclosures people might be dealing with...and secondly, I wouldn’t know whether people were responding appropriately actually.” (University Manager)

Most UMs agreed that compulsory, tailored staff training, conducted alongside other annual training would be beneficial, provided adequate resources and priorities were in place.

### *Our Recommendations for Practice*

Our combined work in this area, including our evaluation of existing policies and processes and input from students, staff and university managers has provided important recommendations for practice for tackling sexual violence and harassment in UK HEIs and changing the culture. The following section provides our key recommendations for practice, based around: a) raising awareness, b) providing support, c) policies and procedures and d) safe spaces and security.

#### a) Raising Awareness

1. Universities must create dedicated and joint University and Students' Union campaigns focusing on encouraging respect and awareness, equality, openness, pro-social behaviour and other key messages at all levels, forming part of the wider campus culture. This should be introduced in Welcome Week and ongoing throughout the year. There should be a particular focus on sports clubs and societies within the Students' Union, given our research has also identified issues within these areas specifically. These campaigns should be clearly marketed on all sites, with dedicated webpages, branding and social media presence, emphasising the campus-wide zero tolerance approach, while signposting support and report services. This might include external support services for institutions while internal processes may be put in place.

2. Joint university and Students' Union workshops focusing on challenging victim blaming and encouraging people to disclose incidents must be implemented. Work in this area should also

tackle related myths, attributions and stereotypes, with a focus on enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion.

3. Consent related initiatives and interventions focusing on increasing awareness, confidence building and training should be created, exploring when consent may be withdrawn and implicit bias. Such initiatives must be driven from the highest level of the university, with centralised university support, resources, administration and workload recognition, to ensure consent conversations are situated within all university programmes and wider campus life.

4. Universities must continue to ensure sexual violence, assault and hate crime is embedded across subjects within the curriculum, linking to real world problems and changing the culture.

5. Universities must involve students at all stages, including in developing and reconfiguring Fresher's week activities, whilst tackling existing notions of lad-culture, intoxication and excess. This includes increasing the inclusivity and sense of belonging of induction and welcome events. Such work would tackle prevailing attitudes, norms and expectations. Action taken should be promoted at Open Days and on recruitment documentation, to begin to change the culture before students start university.

6. Universities must enhance partnership working, ensuring students and staff work with local councils, police, licensing authorities and other organisations. This includes working with local premises within and around universities that students may frequent (e.g. nightclubs, bars, other community spaces) to develop partnerships and initiatives in this area (e.g. report and support options, street pastors etc.) and promote existing campaigns. Ongoing work to build on the relationship between the student community of practice and local community will be required.

7. A clear section relating to sexual assault and harassment should be present on front pages of University websites and student-facing website hubs. This should contain all information

required for reporting incidents, what will happen following a report, as well as available support and referral mechanisms (internal and external). This central hub for staff, students and University Managers should be clearly signposted with a dedicated Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and not just link to sexual violence policy documents, but present information in a clear and accessible way.

8. Training for UMs, students and other staff to address biases/discriminatory assumptions regarding the student population and sexual violence and harassment with appropriate mechanisms to deal with discriminatory perceptions when expressed.

b) Providing Support:

9. Universities should implement a joined-up approach to identify communication channels and processes of referral, as well as ongoing wellbeing or support following disclosure. Work is required to ensure disclosures are handled sensitively and effectively by University Faculties, staff, student services, mental health teams, Students' Union and external agencies (e.g. Police, Rape Crisis and others).

10. Dedicated, specialised and expertly trained teams focusing on disclosures and referrals should be resourced, including case managers to support students and liaise within key teams. These individuals should liaise both internally and externally to reduce the repetitive telling of traumatic incidents.

11. Personal Tutors must be given sufficient time in workload allocation to deal with disclosures effectively and be appropriately resourced, as they are key to student disclosures. Universities should also consider the impact on changing HEI landscapes and the centralisation of support services on staff roles and available support.

12. Compulsory disclosure training for Personal Tutors and other frontline staff dealing with disclosure should be developed. This should be related to other roles, such as student representatives. Staff development days should deliver compulsory training.

13. Frontline student services, such as mental health and counselling, should be adequately resourced and joined up to provide support for students disclosing incidents of sexual violence, harassment and hate crime.

14. Support for staff which recognises the impact of dealing with disclosures and distressing information should be provided and communicated widely.

#### c) Policies and Procedures

15. Work is required to review and update existing policies and codes of conduct to include sexual violence, assault and misconduct at Universities. This includes ethical frameworks which cover both face to face and online student-student interactions. Student Codes of Conduct should set clear expectations on unacceptable behaviour and policies must address student-staff interactions and power differentials.

16. Universities should ensure policies are clearly available in a wide variety of locations (e.g. online). The production of accessible documents for staff and students which outline key aspects of policies and guidance will be required. This includes a signposting document or web-based resource outlining what happens following disclosure and involved parties. As above, policies must involve student-student as well as staff-student conduct and signpost to processes from disclosure and cover all potential outcomes.

17. Policies and procedures should clearly state that complainants will be believed.

18. The implementation of an online, anonymous reporting mechanism for internal anonymous reporting and disclosure, as well as a range of reporting mechanisms is essential for collecting accurate data on these issues is essential. It is also recommended that this data is collected sector-wide by governing bodies. University structures for reporting on this data at the highest level will need to be in place, which will ensure UMs are aware of prevalence and can adequately resource action in this area, with decisions guided by both accurate institution and sector-wide data.

19. Universities must develop processes and procedures for collecting information and data regarding disclosures of sexual violence, harassment and hate crime, as well as ensuring preventative measures can be targeted according to findings.

20. Universities must develop an action plan to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty, s149 Equality Act 2010, using data collected as per point 18 above to inform SMART objectives in dealing with sexual violence, harassment and hate crime on campus. This should include issues relating to both staff and students.

21. Universities must ensure that policies and procedures clearly state that the university can investigate complaints and disclosures of sexual violence, harassment and hate crime whether or not the matter has been reported to the police. This needs to be effectively communicated to staff and students, with handling processes following equality and protection principles.

22. Universities must establish a policy framework which clearly identifies the rights of the complainant and the alleged perpetrator.

23. Universities should also create clear referral processes where reports can be made externally to the police, Rape Crisis or local sexual assault referral centres. Options should be

made available to the complainant and their decision making and choices must be reinforced throughout this process.

24. Appointing and training specialised investigators for incidents involving sexual violence who understand the issues and impact of trauma will be key.

25. A Sexual Violence working group and/ or Safeguarding advisory group should be created to address these crucial issues, enhancing partnership working and recording of incidences. This will aid the longevity of the work around these issues and include colleagues from across the university. Student consultation at all stages will also be necessary.

#### d) Safe Spaces/Security

While outside the scope of this chapter, our research in this area has also focused on contextual determinants and aspects of campus spaces related to sexual violence and harassment. Recommendations from this aspect of our work includes:

26. Due to our research identifying many existing incidents taking place within halls of residence, universities should conduct a review of security measures on all campuses and halls of residence. This must involve security processes, access to support services, responses to incidences, as well as environmental measures related to conceptions of safety, such as lighting and CCTV. All security measures and responses must be proportionate and necessary, not interfering with the right to privacy.

28. Increasing safety measures during the night time within social spaces is also important and creating local partnerships between those involved in the nightlife economy (e.g. paramedics, police, local proprietors, business owners), University safety/ welfare teams and the Students' Union should be established. Social media campaigns between the Police, Students' Union and University should provide links to support services.

29. Clear signage around campus to indicate who to contact in an emergency.

30. Consider 'student only' spaces on campus and to provide safe spaces where students can seek refuge, or talk to staff they trust without the fear of being judged.

### *Putting Research into Practice*

Our research findings reflect the first part of addressing these issues and we have been active in putting research into practice. Locally, our research has led to some successes within the UK HEI involved in our research. For example, our research findings and recommendations have informed key policies, practices, support services and related campaigns. This includes new dedicated staff and student-facing Sexual Violence and Misconduct policies, staff e-training for responding to disclosures, Personal Tutor training sessions and the implementation of trained Sexual Violence Liaison Officers. Key student and staff resources have been developed, outlining important processes, with dedicated student response and staff support webpages now explicitly highlighting internal and external reporting processes. In addition, a range of different reporting options have been introduced to ensure students are supported at many different opportunities. An active, cross-university working group also meets regularly for ongoing reporting, action and updating of guidance and policies. This cross-university team includes staff from Student's Unions, Student Services, Academic Staff, Professional Services Staff and University Managers at the highest level, as well as key partnerships to external support such as Rape Crisis and the Police.

Collaborative campaigns have also been created and informed by this work, including an institutional #NeverOK campaign which focuses on changing the culture and showing that these types of behaviours are not tolerated. Work is ongoing to ensure a joined-up approach with links to the campaign and related resources occurs both internally (e.g. Open Days and Fresher's Week, Students' Union or sports events) and externally within the local community

(e.g. community partnerships). As well as dedicated marketing and branding for these campaigns, this information is accessible (e.g. available, presented in a variety of formats, through QR links on posters and Student Apps), continually reviewed and updated.

Nationally, our work has also contributed to HEFCE and OfS reports and recommendations in this area, informing suggestions for best practice and government consultations. This includes the minimum safeguarding practices highlighted in the evaluation of Catalyst Fund projects, which has informed the most recent Minimum Standards (OFS, 2021). While this statement of expectations is a good starting point and will hopefully prompt Universities to take action, based on the challenges we have outlined in this chapter, it is unlikely to be enough without addressing many of our above recommendations.

### *Summary and Concluding Points*

Universities have a duty of care for their students, as bound by law, and continue to be key sites for prevention work in tackling sexual violence, which remains a widespread, prevalent and complex global concern. Our mixed-method, cross-disciplinary research in this area has evaluated existing processes, policies and interventions. It has also triangulated student, staff and university manager perceptions, experiences, knowledge, report and support seeking behaviour to provide innovative insights. While interdisciplinary, cross-campus consent-based interventions and active campaigns increase disclosure and help to embed consent conversations into the curriculum, such approaches must be appropriately resourced. Awareness-raising shares key messages and improves support service knowledge, but many policies and procedures do not exist to signpost students to available support when disclosure increases. Furthermore, our work suggests that, not only do many students not know where to report, but frontline staff rely on informal knowledge-seeking routes to support their students. UMs are also too detached to truly be aware of prevalence and how staff are responding.

Therefore, sector and institution-wide prevalence, as well as continued monitoring of case numbers and outcomes are essential in collecting consistent and accurate information. In building a culture of response and change, this information will be essential in ensuring adequate action can be taken, resourced and progress can be measured.

Universities must also work together to reduce the stigma associated with reporting and communicate to staff and students that sexual violence will not be tolerated. We suggest that our recommendations are adopted by Universities, but also by the Universities' regulator and made mandatory. For example, only a comprehensive, institution-wide approach will build an on-campus culture of awareness, empathy, respect and equality, with active bystanders and appropriate support. Having adequate reporting structures in place might then begin to tackle longstanding norms, particularly if action is driven from the highest level. Addressing sexual violence on campus, therefore, requires meaningful and responsive involvement from all areas of the university community, with sector-wide monitoring and partnership working with local specialist organisations.

We hope our work and key recommendations will continue to help ensuring that universities are safer places to live, work and study, so no student or staff member is subject to sexual violence or harassment. Future work should also further investigate the nature and extent of sexual violence between staff within universities and ensure appropriate processes are in place to support this. Despite challenges, changing the campus culture is possible and we look forward to contributing further work in this area, ensuring we can create mutually respectful campus communities which aim to stand together against sexual violence and harassment.

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