

# University of the West of England and UWE Students' Union joint policy statement on: **Zero tolerance to sexual and domestic violence, abuse and harassment<sup>i</sup>**

## **UWE and UWESU believe**

- All students and staff have the right to live, study, work and relax in an environment where they feel safe and are free from any form of sexual and domestic violence, abuse and harassment.
- All students and staff have the right to live, study, work and relax in an environment where their body and personal boundaries are respected.
- No student or staff member should be forced to just 'put up' with sexual and domestic violence, abuse or harassment, and action must be taken where necessary to ensure all students and staff are able to enjoy the campus / student life without experiencing these.
- Sexual harassment should not be tolerated by the University or Students' Union, and those who commit acts of sexual harassment should be stopped (i.e. their behaviour challenged) and disciplined as appropriate for their actions.
- That in order to be effective, a whole- institution approach to preventing sexual and domestic violence, abuse and harassment is necessary. The process of driving social and cultural change must be student-led and in collaboration with and supported by University staff

## **UWE and UWESU resolve**

- To adopt a zero tolerance approach to sexual and domestic violence and sexual harassment on University premises and / or perpetrated by / against students or staff members. 'Zero tolerance' for the purposes of this policy means that incidents of such behaviour should not be left unchallenged.
- To promote a social and cultural environment in which sexual and domestic violence and harassment is less likely to occur.
- To challenge the causes of violence against women such as gender stereotyping and the sexualisation and objectification of women.
- That the institutional response to sexual harassment is no different to its response to racial or homophobic harassment for example. Derogatory comments are no less offensive when they are ostensibly expressed as 'humour', 'banter' or 'joking'.
- To promote better understanding of the concept of sexual consent, and in particular the awareness that if an individual is incapacitated by alcohol or drugs they are not able to give

consent freely, and being in a relationship with someone, or consenting to previous sexual activity, does not imply consent to sex

- To promote better understanding that some behaviours, such as unwanted groping or kissing or other forms of sexual assault, constitute criminal offences which, if reported to the police, may result in arrest and conviction
- To promote better understanding of the early warning signs of domestic abuse and awareness of specialist support services.
- To take appropriate action, be it formal or informal (as deemed appropriate to the circumstances), against students or staff who perpetrate abuse. Possible student disciplinary action is outlined in the University's Student Conduct and Discipline Code.
- To actively encourage students and staff who experience or witness abuse to report it.
- To publicly promote the campus, as a zero tolerance to sexual harassment space, along with a similar promotion for 'virtual spaces' such as social media channels e.g. Facebook, Twitter.
- To develop robust and effective measures to improve the safety of the campus environment and the wellbeing of our students, including issues such as CCTV and security staffing, training and procedures
- To ensure that every staff member or student suffering abuse, harassment or sexual violence and every staff member or student supporting others who are suffering abuse, harassment or sexual violence, is able to find information and have access to support including specialist support
- To systematically collect relevant data by which to measure the scale of the problem and the impact of the University's action

The Vice-Chancellor, Steve West, and the President of the UWESU have both made it clear that they want to see our institution implement a zero-tolerance approach to sexual and domestic violence' abuse and harassment. This policy statement sets out our joint commitment as an institution to this aim, and we will work with relevant stakeholders to ensure its implementation, including periodic review.

### **National and International Context**

The NUS have recently published their own research report, "[That's What She Said: Women students' experience of 'lad culture' in higher education](#)". The research undertaken makes it clear that in the social side of University life sexist, misogynistic and homophobic "banter" appears to be commonplace.

In the United States, President Obama has launched the [It's On Us campaign](#), a national public service campaign that urges students to combat sexual assault on their campuses. In the United States, it is estimated that one in five women has been sexually assaulted during her college years, of which only 12 percent are reported, and only a fraction of those offenders are punished. Calling for a "fundamental shift in ... culture," Obama stated that:

*Campus sexual assault is no longer something we as a nation can turn away from and say, 'that's not our problem,'...It is not just on parents of young women to caution them, it is on the parents of young men to teach them respect for women. It is on grown men*

*to set an example and be clear about what it means to be a man. ... It is on all of us to reject the quiet tolerance of sexual assault and to refuse to accept what's unacceptable.*

Data suggests the seriousness of the problem faced by women students nationally:

- 7% of women students experienced a serious sexual assault ([2010 NUS Hidden Marks Report](#))
- 77% students have experienced sexual harassment ([University of Cambridge survey](#))
- 12% women students have been subjected to stalking (Hidden Marks Report)
- Women aged 16 - 24 have higher risk of experiencing domestic violence (Office for National Statistics 2013)

It is acknowledged that sexual violence, abuse and harassment are not only an issue for women but may impact on individuals of any gender or sexual orientation. However we recognize that the vast majority of victims of sexual violence, abuse and harassment are women, and the vast majority of perpetrators are men. The focus of our policy and actions will take account of this reality.

### **Legislative context**

Individuals may be criminally or civilly liable for their own actions. The University and Students Union recognise their duties and obligations in law to students and staff as individuals and the community as a whole, such as under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998.

### **UWE**

The University have already launched the [Intervention Initiative](#), funded by Public Health England, and led by academics in the UWE Bristol Law School. It has developed a suite of resources to support universities in England to implement an evidence-based bystander intervention programme to address sexual coercion and domestic violence in university settings by encouraging students to take steps to prevent sexual violence and coercion. The University has a number of policies already linked to this area, under which reports can be made and action taken, in particular the [Student Conduct Policy](#), [Professional Suitability](#), [Bullying and Harassment policy](#) and [Student Safeguarding Policy](#). The UWE SU has a [Safer Spaces Policy](#) and is launching a Women's campaign in 2014 which includes specific reference to sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women. Jointly the University and SU are working with key stakeholders, including the Police and local councils to reduce sexual violence and harassment through support for the [White Ribbon](#) campaign. We acknowledge that sexual violence and harassment will often occur outside university premises, particularly in clubs in Bristol, and we will actively seek to promote 'safer spaces' in other venues that students use (note: the successful University of Leeds [campaign](#) on this issue). We also acknowledge that violence and abuse occur within domestic or family environments and between those in a relationship, and all forms of domestic abuse are encompassed within this policy statement.

### **Awareness of this policy statement**

- This statement shall be available to view on the UWE and UWESU websites and should be actively promoted through UWE Student Communication and SU channels, particularly in bars and student residencies across all campuses
- UWE and UWESU staff should all be made aware of this statement through staff communication channels as well as becoming part of new staff induction. Specific training should be provided for staff in relevant areas such as student residencies, security, and bar staff.

## Judgements on interpretation

- Where a ruling on the interpretation of this policy statement is required in particular circumstances, i.e. if clarification on what the wording in this policy means is needed, the joint judgement of the UWE Director of Student Engagement and Success and the President of UWE SU shall be sought. If these two people cannot come to an agreement then the final ruling of the University via the Vice Chancellor shall be sought.
- This policy statement complements and promotes other policies such as the University's Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures, and does not replace or change such policies. Any challenges or appeals to such policies, or to disciplinary action initiated by them, should follow the procedure outlined within the relevant policy.

Approved by Academic Board, 17.12.14

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<sup>i</sup> **Sexual Violence** is any kind of unwanted sexual touching including groping, and other forms of sexual assault, sexual penetration, as well as rape. **Sexual harassment** is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature. It can include catcalling, groping, following, wolf-whistling, derogatory comments, sexual comments about a person's body of clothing, asking questions about someone's sexual life, making somebody feel uncomfortable through displaying or sharing sexual material. This includes putting pornographic pictures on walls in a shared environment or sending sexually explicit emails or texts (for more information see for example <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/whatish.pdf>) It includes stalking in person or online. **Domestic Abuse** is the misuse of emotional, physical, financial or sexual control of one person over another. The abuser may be a family member or someone who is or has been in a relationship with the person suffering the abuse.

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

*any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behavior, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:*

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional*

More information available from [Bristol Abuse Myths Booklet](#)